READY PLAYER ONE

Screenplay by ERNEST CLINE

Based on his novel

SECOND DRAFT - 3.25.2011

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FADE IN:

ON THE EARTH, seen from orbit. We're looking down at NORTH AMERICA, but some of the coastlines seem unfamiliar, due to rising sea levels.

We HURTLE DOWN through the cloud layer until we have an AERIAL VIEW of a decaying metropolitan city, surrounded by SOLAR POWER PLANTS and fields of WIND TURBINES.

SUPER: OKLAHOMA CITY, 2040

The city streets teem with poverty-stricken pedestrians, bicycles, rickshaws, and a few electric transports. But there isn't a single gasoline-powered vehicle in sight. SIGNS everywhere urge citizens to: CONSERVE ENERGY!

EXT. OKLAHOMA CITY - DOWNTWON - DAY

HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE stand in line outside a GOVERNMENT FOOD DISTRIBUTION CENTER, waiting to pick up their weekly box of rations. Standing at the very back of the line is--

WADE WATTS, a fifteen year boy in ragged clothing, doing his math homework on a battered TABLET COMPUTER.

A weary YOUNG WOMAN with two malnourished KIDS gets in line behind him. Wade smiles at her, then allows her to step in front of him in line. She bows in gratitude.

Wade glances up above them, where an enormous DIGITAL BILLBOARD is running an endless stream of COMMERCIALS:

COMMERCIAL #1:

An overly-enthusiastic SALESMAN shows us around a SHOWROOM filled with state-of-the-art OASIS hardware.

SALESMAN
Are you tired of your old gloves-and-visor interface? Do you want to get even more out of the OASIS? Well now you can! Announcing Innovative Online Industries new line of haptic suits and full-body OASIS immersion rigs!

The salesman walks over to an ATHLETIC GUY in a HAPTIC SUIT - a strange FULL-BODY JUMPSUIT covered with a hydraulic exoskeleton. He's wearing an OASIS VISOR (streamlined Virtual Reality goggles) and gloves. He appears to be kick-boxing with an invisible opponent.

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SALESMAN
At IOI, we're taking the "virtual" out of "virtual reality."

The man in the haptic suit pulls up his visor and flashes a big smile at the camera as he recites the IOI tagline:

HANDSOME GUY
"It's as real as you can feel!"

ON WADE - Wishing he could afford this gear. He focuses back on his homework as another commercial begins...

COMMERCIAL #2:

A concerned MOTHER watches her ZOMBIE-LIKE TEENAGE SON, who sits in a recliner, staring into an OASIS visor. He makes faint gestures in the air with his haptic gloves.

CONCERNED MOTHER
I'm worried about little Johnny. He spends every waking moment inside the OASIS. He doesn't even log out to eat. I really don't know what to do...

A deep, comforting VOICE OVER kicks in:

VOICE OVER
Everyone loves to escape from reality inside the OASIS. But it's easy to overdo it. OASIS Addiction is a serious problem. If you suspect that you or someone you love suffers from OA, call the number below, or visit us inside the OASIS. We can help!
(very fast)
This has been a Public Service Announcement from the President's Council on OASIS Addiction--

The PSA is interrupted by a SPECIAL NEWS BULLETIN.

Wade and everyone else on the street shifts their attention to the billboard above them.

ON THE BILLBOARD: A gorgeous female NEWS ANCHOR addresses the camera.

NEWS ANCHOR
This is Allison Evans at WNN, with a Special News Bulletin. James
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D)
Halliday, the video game designer who created the OASIS, died last night at his home after a long battle with cancer. He was sixty-seven years old. **

A PHOTO OF HALLIDAY appears. He's a balding man with glasses, with a hint of mad genius in his eyes. Sort of a cross between BILL GATES and HOWARD HUGHES. **

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D) **
The eccentric billionaire hadn't appeared in public in over a decade. Halliday was a lifelong bachelor, with no living relatives, so it remains uncertain who will take control of the OASIS and inherit his vast fortune-- **

The bulletin cuts to LIVE VIDEO of OASIS SYSTEMS, a large skyscraper. A huge crowd of MOURNERS has gathered in front of the building. (Many of them are also logged in to the OASIS, via wireless rigs.) The sidewalk is covered with photos of Halliday, flowers, candles, etc. **

NEWS ANCHOR **
Thousands of Halliday's devoted fans have already gathered outside the OASIS Systems offices in downtown Columbus, to pay their last respects to this great man. **

The NEWS ANCHOR pauses, touching her earpiece. **

NEWS ANCHOR (CONT'D) **
--we've just been informed that James Halliday prepared a brief video message, to be released to the world media at the time of his death. Apparently, Halliday has also emailed a copy of this video to every single OASIS user... **

ON WADE - watching along with everyone else. He uses his tablet to check his email. He has one NEW MESSAGE - from James Halliday. The subject line is: ANORAK'S INVITATION. **

His eyes GO WIDE as he glances back up at the jumbotron -- **

ON THE VIDEO - The opening of "Dead Man's Party" by Oingo Boingo plays over a black screen. Then the image CUTS TO: **

INT. HOSPITAL ROOM - DAY **

JAMES HALLIDAY sits in a hospital bed. His body is emaciated and ravaged by illness. He summons his energy, clears his throat and addresses the viewer. **

JAMES HALLIDAY **
When I created the OASIS, it was intended to be a new form of entertainment and communication. I never imagined it would evolve into a global obsession. It's true that the OASIS allows scientists, doctors, and artists all around the world to collaborate with each other. But it's become a place for humanity to hide from its problems, while the real world suffers from gross neglect. For years now, I've considered shutting the simulation down for good. But I could never decide if that would do more harm than good. And now that I'm gone, I'll have to leave that decision to my successor. Speaking of which... **

Halliday opens the cover of a mammoth legal document - his WILL - and begins to read from it: **

JAMES HALLIDAY **
"I, James Donovan Halliday, being of sound mind and disposing memory, do hereby make, publish and declare this instrument to be my Last Will and Testament..." **

The hospital room vanishes and the scene changes to **

EXT. HALLIDAY'S MANSION - DAY **

Halliday now appears to be in perfect health. He's standing outside the entrance of his enormous high-tech mansion. It's part palace, part fortress. **

JAMES HALLIDAY **
Everything I posses, including control of my company, OASIS Systems, will be placed in escrow, until such time as a single condition set forth in my will is met. The first person to meet that **
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

JAMES HALLIDAY (CONT'D)
condition will inherit everything. **
You see-- **
(he grins for a beat) **
I'm holding a little contest. **

He opens the doors and we follow him into his opulent **
mansion. AWARDS, DEGREES, and PRICELESS WORKS OF ART **
cover the walls and line the hallways. **

As Halliday walks further into the mansion, he morphs **
into ANORAK, his famous OASIS avatar. Anorak has a **
slightly more handsome version of Halliday's face. He **
also has a full head of hair and wears no eyeglasses. **

ANORAK **
Before I shuffled off this mortal **
coil, I created this crown and hid **
it somewhere inside the OASIS. **

A JEWELED CROWN appears in Anorak's right hand. A **
calligraphic letter 'A' is carved into its surface. **

ANORAK **
The first person to find the crown **
will inherit my entire fortune, **
and control of the OASIS itself. **
It's a big responsibility, so I **
have to make sure that I entrust **
my legacy to the right person... **

He pauses dramatically as we **

CUT TO: **

EXT. REAL WORLD - SERIES OF SHOTS **

As Halliday's video message continues to play, we see **
PEOPLE ALL AROUND THE WORLD watching: **

HUGE CROWDS watch on a jumbotron in TIMES SQUARE. **

STUNNED COMMUTERS on an electric transport watch the **
announcement on visors and handheld smartphones. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - FOOD LINE - DAY **

Wade's jaw drops open. Along with everyone else, he **
stares up at the billboard screen in amazement. **

BACK ON THE VIDEO: **

CONTINUED:

ANORAK (CONT'D) **
The crown is well hidden. Finding **
it will require great skill, **
intelligence, bravery, and **
determination. The challenges I've **
created are designed to find the **
one person worthy of controlling **
the future of the OASIS. Now **
listen carefully... **

THREE KEYS appear, spinning in air in front of him. They **
appear to be made of COPPER, JADE, and CRYSTAL. **

Below the keys, several lines of text appear in flaming **
subtitles, as Anorak reads them aloud: **

ANORAK **
Three hidden keys open three **
secret gates, wherein the errant **
will be tested for worthy traits. **
And those with the skill to **
survive these straits, will reach **
The End where the crown awaits. **

INT. THE OASIS - HALLIDAY'S MANSION - VIDEO CLIP **

Anorak reaches the end of a long corridor, arriving at a **
pair of massive wooden doors. **

Anorak throws open the doors, revealing a vast TREASURE **
ROOM, filled with mountains of gold coins and jewel- **
encrusted goblets. Then he turns to face us. **

ANORAK (CONT'D) **
So... let the hunt begin. **

Anorak vanishes in a flash of light, leaving us to gaze **
through the open doorway at the treasure beyond. **

Then the VIDEO ENDS and the image cuts back to the NEWS **
ANCHOR, who seems too stunned to speak. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - FOOD LINE - DAY **

The crowd around Wade suddenly ERUPTS INTO CHAOS as **
people sprint off in all directions, desperate to log in **
to the OASIS and begin searching for Halliday's prize. **

But Wade stands there frozen, staring up at Halliday's **
face on the billboard in wonder. **

CONTINUED:

Then he slowly breaks into a smile, because he knows that his whole life has just changed... **

FADE TO BLACK. **

TITLE CARD: FIVE YEARS LATER **

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - DAY **

Wade, now age 20, is running through a SHANTY TOWN on the outskirts of Oklahoma City - an overcrowded hell hole known as THE STACKS. **

It's a sprawling vertical hive of mobile homes, RVs, and shipping containers, all stacked in PRECARIOUS TOWERS that are supported by an elaborate makeshift scaffold. Every surface is covered with a patchwork array of SOLAR PANELS. LADDERS are bolted to the side of each stack. **

Wade weaves his way through the DARK MAZE at the floor of the stacks - alleyways littered with old appliances, furniture, and other junk. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - VEHICLE PILE - MORNING **

Wade reaches a huge mountain of abandoned cars and trucks piled near the Stacks' outer perimeter. He climbs and crawls his way deeper into the pile of vehicles, following a memorized route. Along the way, he activates a series of wireless SECURITY CAMERAS and MOTION DETECTORS that he's scavenged from other devices. **

Finally, Wade reaches an upended CARGO VAN buried at the bottom, with its rear bumper pointing skyward. He checks to make sure he hasn't been followed, then opens the van's rear doors and drops inside. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - CONTINUOUS **

It's PITCH BLACK, until Wade switches on a small battery-powered lamp and we're able to see the van's interior: **

Inside this small hidden "room" is where Wade has assembled his state-of-the-art OASIS IMMERSION RIG. Over the past five years, all of this gear has gotten smaller and more streamlined, compared to what we saw in those opening commercials. Like an iPad compared to an old Mac. **

CONTINUED:

On the floor is his OMNIDIRECTIONAL TREADMILL - a rolling square mat that allows Wade to walk or run in any direction, without ever leaving the treadmill surface. **

Wade quickly changes into his HAPTIC SUIT, then puts on his OASIS visor and haptic gloves. He powers on his OASIS CONSOLE, which fills the tiny room with blue light. He raises his gloved hands and makes a few gestures, activating the OASIS login sequence, and we **

SMASH CUT TO: **

WADE'S POV - We see a flash of RED LIGHT as lasers scan his retinas and verify his identity. Then the following text appears, floating in a black void in front of him: **

WELCOME BACK TO THE OASIS, PARZIVAL! **
LOGIN COMPLETED: 2.12.2040 - 7:08 AM OST **

READY PLAYER ONE **

INT. THE OASIS - PARZIVAL'S FORTRESS - DAY **

Wade is now logged in to THE OASIS, a virtual reality simulation that looks and sounds extremely real. **

Wade's OASIS AVATAR looks like an idealized version of his real-world self. Cleaner, healthier, better dressed. **

He's sitting inside his COMMAND CENTER - a transparent dome embedded in the surface of a rocky ASTEROID. **

Through the clear dome, we see a starry sky, filled with HUNDREDS OF OTHER PLANETS, of all sizes and colors. **

Wade's avatar sits in a rotating chair in front of an elaborate CONTROL PANEL filled with security monitors. **

He may be broke in the real world, but in the OASIS, Wade has his own private planet with an underground fortress. **

Wade stands and walks over to a TURBO ELEVATOR. The doors swish open and he steps inside. **

Meanwhile, in the real world: **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade walks on the treadmill, MOVING IN PERFECT SYNCH WITH HIS OASIS AVATAR as it boards the turbo elevator. **

INT. THE OASIS - TURBO ELEVATOR - SAME TIME **

The turbo elevator doors close. **

WADE **
Armory. **

The lift rockets downward, deeper into Wade's underground **
fortress, which fills the asteroid's hollowed out core. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S ARMORY - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade steps off the elevator, into a room, filled with **
racks of WEAPONS. All kinds of guns, swords, and armor. **

Wade begins to outfit his avatar with his best gear. He **
dons a suit of bad ass POWERED ARMOR, then straps a pair **
of swords to his back, and holsters two BLASTER PISTOLS. **

He looks ready to kick some serious ass. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S HANGAR - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade steps off the elevator into his massive subterranean **
vehicle hangar. Launch doors are embedded in the ceiling. **

Wade crosses the hangar, passing all of the vehicles and **
ships his avatar owns. He has a Batmobile, a **
Lambordighni, a flying DeLorean, and four different **
spaceships, including an X-Wing fighter. **

THE HANGAR DOORS SLIDE open, revealing a long launch **
tunnel leading up to the asteroid surface. **

Wade boards his X-Wing and rockets out of the hangar. **

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - LATER **

Wade pilots his spaceship through the starry void, **
rocking out to a song on its stereo. A wide array of **
planets are visible in the background. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COCKPIT - SAME TIME **

A MESSAGE flashes on Wade's HUD: INCOMING CALL FROM AECH **

Wade taps an icon and the face of his friend AECH **
(pronounced "H") appears on his cockpit viewscreen. Aech **
is a Caucasian male avatar about the same age as Wade. **

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

WADE
Hey, Aech. How goes it?

AECH
Please tell me you're not headed for that portal on Gygax...

WADE
That's exactly where I'm headed. Wanna grab a drink after I'm done?

AECH
Don't go through with it, Z. You're about to commit suicide. Do you want to lose everything you've gained over the past five years? You want to start over with a pussy first level avatar? Broke? Powerless? Humiliated?

WADE
Thanks for the vote of confidence.

AECH
Every avatar who has ever gone in there has died. Every single one.

WADE
Don't you think there's a reason for that? There has to be something important hidden in there. Maybe a clue related to the crown. Whatever it is, I don't want the Sixers to find it first.

AECH
Dude, you're risking everything on a stupid hunch. You're gonna get yourself killed for nothing!

WADE
Piss off. I know what I'm doing.

Wade hangs up on Aech, just as his ship swings into orbit around a GREEN PLANET and descends toward the surface.

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET GYGAX - MOMENTS LATER

Wade lands his ship on rocky terrain, on the outskirts of some sprawling ANCIENT RUINS reminiscent of Stonehenge.

CONTINUED:

Wade's cockpit opens and his avatar jumps out. He draws his guns, takes a deep breath, and runs into the ruins. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade runs on his treadmill, moving in perfect synch with his avatar. **

INT. THE OASIS - PLANET GYGAX - RUINS - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade slowly approaches a crumbling STONE ARCH covered in STRANGE HIEROGLYPHICS. A TWO-DIMENSIONAL PORTAL appears inside the stone arch - a doorway leading into a SWIRLING FIELD OF STARS. **

Wade takes a step toward the portal, but halts when he hears a DISEMBODIED FEMALE VOICE. **

SYSTEM VOICE **
Warning. This zone is recommended for avatars who are 95th level or higher. Your avatar is 82nd level. **

Wade doesn't seem very concerned. **

WADE **
Good to know. **

He takes another step forward. **

SYSTEM VOICE **
If you choose to enter this zone, OASIS Systems cannot be held responsible for the likely death of your avatar, or for the loss of all your virtual property and power levels-- **

Wade takes a deep breath and jumps through the portal. His avatar vanishes inside. **

INT. THE OASIS - COLISEUM - DAY **

Wade's avatar reappears in the center of a COLISEUM. The stands are empty and the entire structure is crumbling and covered with moss and debris. It is eerily silent. **

There is a PLATINUM DOOR set into the opposite wall of the coliseum. It's encrusted with jewels that glitter in the simulated sunlight. **

CONTINUED:

Wade's first instinct is to head for that door - but he halts in his tracks, carefully studying his surroundings. **

He spots something odd about one of the PILLARS that encircle the arena. He walks over to examine it and discovers a FADED INSCRIPTION carved into the stone. **

He brushes away the dust and is able to read it: **

The first key awaits explorers **
In a tomb filled with horrors **
But you must search the game **
If you hope to see your name **
Listed among the high scorers **

Wade's eyes go wide. He quickly snaps a screenshot (a virtual photo) of the inscription. Then he turns and begins to walk toward that glittering door... **

Suddenly there's a loud RUMBLE and the GROUND SHAKES. **

Wade turns to run, just as the FLOOR CRACKS WIDE OPEN in front of him and an enormous TARASQUE emerges. It's a <u>towering sixty-foot-tall lizard-like creature with razor-sharp teeth</u>. Makes a Tyrannosaur look like a kitten. **

WADE (CONT'D) **
Fuck. **

The Tarasque opens its mouth and lets out a bloodcurdling ROAR, then it CHARGES DIRECTLY AT WADE. **

Wade stumbles backward, unloading his blaster pistols at the beast. He nails it repeatedly in the torso, but this just seems to piss it off more than anything else. **

And it keeps coming. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade runs from side to side on his omnidirectional treadmill, hands raised as he fires his imaginary "guns." His movements are in perfect synch with his avatar. **

INT. THE OASIS - COLISEUM - SAME TIME **

Wade continues firing his blasters until they both OVERHEAT. Then he holsters them a draws his sword. **

Just as the Tarasque is about to crush him underfoot, Wade activates his POWERED ARMOR and TAKES FLIGHT. **

CONTINUED:

He flies around behind the Tarasque and swings at it with his glowing sword - opening a long gash in the beast's neck. It SCREECHES IN PAIN. **

Wade grins and swings around for another attack, but the Tarasque anticipates this move... **

As Wade raises his sword, the beast snaps its giant head around, lightning quick, and BITES WADE'S AVATAR IN HALF WITH ITS RAZOR-SHARP TEETH! **

Wade's upper torso falls to earth, while the Tarasque devours his lower half. **

A MESSAGE appears up on Wade's HUD: <u>GAME OVER</u> **

Wade's eyes go wide in shock his avatar's body SLOWLY FADES OUT OF EXISTENCE, leaving behind a PILE OF ITEMS - all the stuff he was carrying. Then EVERYTHING GOES DARK. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade stands motionless on his treadmill, arms at his sides. He's still staring into his visor in total shock. **

His knees give out and he slides to the floor. **

INT. THE OASIS - BLACK VOID - SAME TIME **

Wade now sees nothing but darkness. Then another MESSAGE pops up on his HUD: **

YOUR AVATAR HAS BEEN KILLED. WOULD YOU LIKE TO CREATE A NEW FIRST LEVEL AVATAR WITH THE SAME NAME? **

Two buttons appear below the message, labeled YES and NO. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade stares at the message in disbelief. He's just lost everything. **

INT. THE OASIS - BLACK VOID - SAME TIME **

Eventually, Wade slowly reaches up and taps YES. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - NIGHT **

Wade emerges from his hideout, which is completely camouflaged by the surrounding pile of cars. **

He makes his way through the stacks, then ascends a series of ladders, until he reaches a large SHIPPING CONTAINER. He opens the door and goes inside. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S BUNK - NEXT MORNING **

Wade lies awake on a narrow bunk bed, trying to muster the will to get up. He finally sits up, groaning at his bleak surroundings. **

He lives inside this WINDOWLESS METAL BOX - the shipping container's interior is lined with bunk beds, all occupied by people who are either sleeping or logged into the OASIS. It's a dark, crowded shithole. **

He stands up, stretching, and greets FAISEL (30s), who sleeps in the bunk above him. Faisel wears a visor and haptic gloves and is currently logged in the OASIS. **

WADE **
Hey, Faisel. **

Faisel doesn't raise his visor. His gloved hands make strange gestures in the air in front of him. **

FAISEL **
Morning, Wade. **
(beat) **
I heard about your avatar getting killed. Sorry, man. That was one hell of a ballsy move. Respect. **

WADE **
Thanks. **
(changing the subject) **
Any work today? **

FAISEL **
What does it look like? No. No work again today. **

WADE **
Bummer. So what you doing? **

CONTINUED:

FAISEL
Hanging out with my father in Mumbai. We're about to play a game of cricket. Care to join us?

Wade pulls on his coat.

WADE
No thanks. I gotta get to class.

Faisel shakes his head.

FAISEL
Still wasting all of your money on education, eh?

WADE
Halliday had three degrees by the time he was twenty-five.

Faisel grins - he's heard this before.

Wade steps outside and quickly closes the door, standing on the scaffolding that supports the shipping container, and the trailers and RVs stacked below and around it.

Wade steps on to a ladder and begins to ascend, until he reaches a small AIRSTREAM TRAILER near the top of the stack. He knocks on the door.

INT. REAL WORLD - MRS. GILMORE'S TRAILER - CONTINUOUS

MRS. GILMORE, a gray-haired woman in her 60s, opens the door and Wade steps into her tiny trailer. A small DOG runs over and leaps up into Wade's arms.

MRS. GILMORE
Hello, Wade!

WADE
Hey, Mrs. G.
(to dog)
Hi, Thurber! How you doing, boy?

MRS. GILMORE
Do you have time for breakfast this morning? I've got soy bacon and powdered eggs...

CONTINUED:

WADE
No thanks, Mrs. Gilmore. I just came by to walk Thurber before I head to school.

Wade grabs a full trash bag by the door.

MRS. GILMORE
Wade, you don't always have to do that! I can take out my own trash.

Ignoring her, Wade hauls the trash outside, then drops it into a dumpster on the ground, seven stories below.

Wade steps back inside, then kneels down and slips Thurber into his backpack.

WADE
Back in a bit, Mrs. G! Let's go, Thurber...

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - ROOFTOPS - MORNING

Wade and Thurber run side-by-side across the uneven metal rooftops of the Stacks, making a circuit of the walkways that connect them. It's obvious that both of them have been navigating this terrain all of their lives.

Suddenly they reach a LARGE GAP BETWEEN TWO ROOFTOPS. Without hesitation, Wade and Thurber both LEAP ACROSS THE DEADLY EXPANSE TOGETHER.

They land on the adjacent rooftop in unison, then keep on running, both silhouetted against a brilliant sunrise.

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - LATER

Wade returns Thurber to Mrs. G's trailer, then continues to descend the latticework of platforms and girders, until he finally reaches the ground.

Then he makes his way to his hideout, constantly checking to make sure he isn't being followed.

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - DAY

Wade enters, then quickly puts on his visor, haptic suit, and gloves. As he powers on his OASIS console we

SMASH CUT TO:

EXT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COLLEGE - DAY **

WADE'S AVATAR slowly materializes in front of his VIRTUAL COLLEGE CAMPUS. Its the largest, coolest college campus we've ever seen, bordered by rolling green fields on one side and an OCEAN VIEW on the other. The clear blue sky overhead is filled with HUNDREDS OF PLANETS. **

The STUDENT PARKING LOTS are filled with hundreds of COOL CARS and GLEAMING SPACESHIPS (the keen eye will notice models from different sci-fi movies and TV shows). Ferraris. Flying saucers. TIE-Fighters. You name it. Anything a kid could possibly want to drive. **

Wade walks past a wild LOW-GRAVITY BASKETBALL game going on outside the student union. **

Other STUDENT and PROFESSOR AVATARS walk by Wade on their way to class. Everyone looks THIN AND BEAUTIFUL in the OASIS. Perfect faces on perfect bodies... **

Except for WADE'S AVATAR - who looks just like he does in the real world. Gaunt and gritty. The other avatars who spot him shake their heads at his appearance. His face and body look the same, but he's no longer wears the cool armor and gear we saw before. His new wimpy FIRST LEVEL AVATAR wears a T-shirt and jeans. **

Wade begins to cross the campus. Off to his right is a glowing BORDERLINE set into the grass, marking the edge of SCHOOL GROUNDS. On the other side of this line we see AVATARS with all sorts of strange appearances - ANDROIDS, ALIENS, ELVES, SUPERHEROES and VAMPIRES. **

But as they step onto to school grounds, these avatars instantly MORPH into HUMAN FORM, just as they pass a SIGN that reads: UNIVERSITY DRESS CODE AUTOMATICALLY ENFORCED. NO NON-HUMAN AVATARS ALLOWED ON SCHOOL GROUNDS! **

INT. THE OASIS - LECTURE HALL - SAME **

Wade's avatar sits down in a massive lecture hall. The other seats are filled with STUDENT AVATARS. Their PROFESSOR stands in front of the class. **

HISTORY PROFESSOR **
Okay, settle down. Today we're going to visit the Ancient Library of Alexandria... **

The professor makes a sweeping gesture with his hand and the classroom suddenly DISAPPEARS. **

INT. THE OASIS - ANCIENT EGYPT - CONTINUOUS

Wade and his fellow classmates are now standing inside an enormous ancient library. The shelves are filled with papyrus scrolls. **

HISTORY PROFESSOR **
This is was largest library of the ancient world. It functioned as a major center of scholarship from the time of its construction in the 3rd century B.C. until Julius Ceaser accidentally burned the place down in 48 B.C.-- **

Wade stands off by himself, barely paying attention. He's clearly a loner, even in here. **

The professor points to an INSCRIPTION etched into the wall above them - several words in ancient greek. **

HISTORY PROFESSOR **
It translates: "The place of the cure of the soul." The ancient scholars believed that the quest for knowledge was the key to human happiness... **

Wade yawns and checks his watch. **

SERIES OF SHOTS - WADE'S CLASSES: **

-Wade and his SCIENCE CLASS stand on the RINGS OF SATURN while their professor explains how they formed. **

-In BIOLOGY, Wade and his classmates travel through the valves of a human heart, like in Fantastic Voyage. **

-In ART CLASS, Wade and his classmates tour the Louvre, checking out priceless works of art. As before, Wade stands apart from the other students, who are gathered in groups, chatting noisily. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S LATIN CLASS - DAY **

Wade and the other students sit in a recreation of an ancient Roman forum. Their professor, MS. RANK, wears a TOGA. She's reciting Latin words in a dull monotone. Wade looks half asleep. **

CONTINUED:

MS. RANK **
Ludus. Now this word should be **
easy for you to remember, because **
its also the name of the OASIS **
planet we're on right now. Ludus **
is Latin for "school." However, it **
can also mean "sport" or "game." **

Wade suddenly sits bolt upright.

He opens a window in front of his avatar, displaying the **
inscription he found, just before his avatar was killed. **
He reads it to himself:

WADE (V.O.)
The First Key awaits explorers **
In a tomb filled with horrors **
But <u>you must search the game</u> **
If you hope to see your name **
Listed among the high scorers. **
(beat) **
You must search "the game." **

Wade looks out the window at the landscape of Ludus, his **
eyes wide with a stunning realization. **

Just then a BELL RINGS, signaling the end of the school day. The Roman Forum transforms back into a classroom.

MS. RANK
All right, that's it for today.
I've just emailed all of you your
homework assignment for tomorrow.

Ms. Rank and most of the students log out immediately, and their avatars vanish at their desks. The other students file out into the hallway. In a few seconds, Wade is alone.

He looks out the classroom window, at the green fields
surrounding his school. In the distance we see a FOREST. **

WADE **
Activate System Agent Software. **

A WINDOW pops open in front of his avatar, displaying the **
face of MAX, a middle-aged man in a suit. This is Wade's **
SYSTEM AGENT - a virtual "assistant" that serves as a **
voice-interface with his computer. **

MAX **
How may I assist you, Wade? **

CONTINUED: (2)

WADE
Max, I need you to pull up the OASIS atlas.

A THREE-DIMENSIONAL MAP OF THE OASIS appears in the air in front of him. It contains thousands of virtual PLANETS, of many different sizes and colors.

WADE
Display my current location.

The maps ZOOMS IN, until we see a green planet labeled LUDUS. A flashing RED ARROW beside it says: YOU ARE HERE.

Wade taps the planet and his view changes to a flat two-dimensional WORLD MAP. Ludus is covered with college campuses and public schools, spaced evenly across its surface. The empty land between them is filled with rivers, lakes, oceans, and large patches of FOREST.

WADE
Pull up all of my notes on the Tomb of Horrors.

Another window opens, displaying an image of an old book titled "The Tomb of Horrors."

MAX
The Tomb of Horrors is the title of a Dungeons and Dragons game supplement published in 1978. It was one James Halliday's favorite strategy games--

Wade taps the cover and a digital copy of the TOMB OF HORRORS book appears in his avatar's hands.

WADE
(reciting)
"The First Key awaits explorers in a <u>tomb</u> filled with <u>horrors</u>."

Wade opens the book to an ILLUSTRATION of the TOMB's HIDDEN ENTRANCE - a hill covered with black stones arranged to make it look like a HUMAN SKULL.

WADE (CONT'D)
Okay, Max. We need to find a hill that looks exactly like this. Scan the entire surface of the planet.

CONTINUED: (3)

Wade's computer scans the map, quickly zooming in and out, searching for a match, until it zooms in on a hill covered with stones in a skull-pattern. An exact match. **

WADE (CONT'D) **
Holy shit. There it is! **

Wade runs out of the lecture hall. **

EXT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COLLEGE - SAME **

Wade bursts out of the lecture hall and sprints past the student parking lot, which is now mostly empty. A few of the remaining spaceships are currently blasting into the sky overhead as students head offworld. **

Wade continues running, toward a large DOMED PAVILION adjacent to the campus. As he leaves school grounds, he draws a cheap-looking BRONZE SWORD. He glances at it in disdain - remembering that all his cool gear is now gone. **

EXT. THE OASIS - TRANSPORT TERMINAL - CONTINUOUS **

The pavilion is filled with rows of TELEPORTATION BOOTHS, which resemble old phone booths. Avatars file into them, and then a few seconds later they vanish. **

Wade jumps into the nearest booth. A MAP OF LUDUS appears on a TOUCHSCREEN. Wade selects a spot about a hundred kilometers away from his present location. **

A MESSAGE appears: TELEPORTATION FARE - $122 **

Wade checks his avatar's WEALTH COUNTER. He has $8. **

AUTOMATED VOICE
Sorry, but you don't have enough money to reach the selected destination. Please make another selection. **

WADE
Shit! **

Wade kicks open the booth door and runs back outside.

EXT. THE OASIS - FIELD - CONTINUOUS **

Wade emerges from the Transport Terminal and sprints across one of the green fields adjacent to the campus. **

CONTINUED:

As he runs, Wade pulls up his map of Ludus. The path to his destination is highlighted as a GLOWING RED LINE. **

Wade keeps on running at top speed, following the line. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME **

Wade is still in his hideout, running at top speed on his omni-directional treadmill. ** **

EXT. THE OASIS - FOREST - LATER

Wade reaches the edge of a FOREST and runs inside. According to his map, he's close to his destination.

EXT. THE OASIS - FOREST CLEARING - MOMENTS LATER

Wade enters a clearing in the forest. Ahead of him is a small flat-topped hill that resembles a human skull - just like the illustration in the Tomb of Horrors module. **

Wade locates the tomb's SECRET ENTRANCE, a cave mouth in the hillside. Clutching his sword, Wade slowly enters it. **

INT. THE OASIS - TOMB OF HORRORS - CONTINUOUS

Total darkness. Wade switches on a FLASHLIGHT, then proceeds carefully down a dark dungeon corridor. **

Wade takes a step forward, then stops. He studies the tiles on the floor, then hesitantly takes another step. But as his foot comes down on the tile-- **

A large TRAP DOOR opens in the floor, revealing a PIT filled with long METAL SPIKES. Wade nearly falls in-- then manages to scramble back from the ledge. **

WADE
Whoa! Slow down, Wade. **

He gets back to his feet and steps around the pit, then continues down the corridor one step at a time, being careful not to spring any more traps.

INT. THE OASIS - TOMB OF HORRORS - CHAPEL - LATER

Wade enters a large chamber, labeled on his map as the CHAPEL OF EVIL. Rows of PEWS and an ominous black ALTAR.

CONTINUED:

Wade searches the room. Beneath of one of the pews he locates a HIDDEN COMPARTMENT. It's filled with GOLD COINS and JEWELS. Wade adds them to his inventory. His WEALTH COUNTER jumps from $8 up to $7,000. **

WADE
Oh hell yes!

INT. THE OASIS - TOMB OF HORRORS - TREASURE ROOM - LATER

Wade enters a room containing TWO WOODEN CHESTS. He avoids a TRIPWIRE and opens the chest on the right. Inside is a MAGIC SWORD and a SUIT OF ARMOR. **

Now wearing his new suit of armor, Wade's avatar looks totally bad ass. And when he picks up the magic sword, its blade is suddenly engulfed in BLUE FLAMES.

WADE
Sweet.

Wade opens the other wooden chest, but this time he uses his sword - to avoid a volley of POISON DARTS that shoot out of the lid. Inside the chest are five VIALS labeled POTIONS OF HEALING. He adds them to his inventory. **

Gripping his FLAMING SWORD, Wade opens the door leading to the next room. As he does--

A massive FOUR-ARMED GARGOYLE leaps through the open doorway and attacks his avatar. But Wade is expecting this, and easily avoids the creature's razor sharp CLAWS. Then he counter attacks with his flaming sword...

He hits the Gargoyle in the shoulder. It HOWLS in PAIN and claws at Wade's face, opening a GASH ON HIS CHEEK. **

Wade leaps backward, then executes an impressive spin and thrusts his flaming sword into the Gargoyle's heart!

Clutching its chest, the creature drops to the floor. It vanishes, leaving behind a gem-studded COLLAR. Wade grabs it and his WEALTH COUNTER jumps another 100 dollars. **

Wade drinks one of his healing potions and THE GASH ON HIS CHEEK MAGICALLY HEALS. He runs into the next room. **

INT. THE OASIS - TOMB OF HORRORS - THRONE ROOM - LATER

A massive throne room. There's a large stone DAIS at opposite end, on which rests an ornate gold THRONE. On it sits a mummified SKELETON. **

Wade crosses the room and ascends the dais steps. When he reaches the top, we hear a sound like twisting leather as the skeletal figure COMES TO LIFE and rises from the throne. Rubies in its eye sockets begin to GLOW. **

ACERERAK
Greetings, Parzival. I am Acererak and this is my tomb. What is it that you seek? **

Wade is barely able to speak.

WADE
I seek the Copper Key... **

ACERERAK
Very well! You shall prove your worth by facing me in a joust!

Wade glances around uncertainly. **

ACERERAK
If you're looking for a horse, you won't be needing one... **

Acererak laughs as his throne suddenly transforms into a classic JOUST ARCADE GAME from 1982. **

WADE
Halliday's favorite video game. **

Acererak gives Wade a wicked grin.

ACERERAK
Be warned, I can only be bested by a warrior of great skill and bravery... **
(beat) **
Best two out of three wins. If you are victorious, I will give you the item you seek.

WADE
And if I lose? **

CONTINUED:

ACERERAK
(theatrically)
Then we fight to the death. **

WADE
Of course. That's what I figured. **

Acererak opens his leathery palm to reveal two shiny quarters. He drops them into the game's coin slot, then positions himself in front of the left joystick.

ACERERAK
Art thou ready?

WADE
Yeah. As ready as I'll ever be.

Wade grabs the other joystick. As soon as he does, both Wade's avatar and Acererak are suddenly SUCKED INTO THE GAME'S VIDEO SCREEN.

INT. THE OASIS - JOUST ARENA - CONTINUOUS

Wade suddenly finds himself inside a lifelike 3-D recreation of the classic video game JOUST!

A dozen CIRCULAR STONE PLATFORMS float in a giant cave-like arena, high above a bubbling LAVA PIT that covers the floor. The walls are lined with stadium seating, packed with a huge CROWD OF MEDIEVAL SPECTATORS.

Wade and Acererak are on platforms at opposite ends. Each of them now sits on the back of a giant winged PTEROSAUR. **

Wade looks down at his restless prehistoric mount in shock. In one hand, his avatar holds a giant LANCE. In the other, the reins of his Pterosaur.

DISEMBODIED VOICE
Prepare thyselves!
(beat)
Three! Two! One! JOUST!

Acererak pulls back on the reins of his Pterosaur. His mount flaps its mighty wings and launches into the air, headed straight for Wade. Acererak raises his lance. **

WADE
Whoa! Hey, hold on! I'm not ready!
I don't even know how to control
this thing!

CONTINUED:

He awkwardly yanks on the reins of his pterosaur. It squawks, flapping its wings and spinning in an circle.

Wade looks up and sees Acererak bearing down on him. Now in a panic, he yanks his reins back and to the right. Wade's pterosaur finally launches into the air, just in time for him to avoid being impaled on Acererak's lance!

As Acererak expertly swings back around, Wade tries to get the hang of maneuvering his massive winged steed. He narrowly avoids colliding with one of the floating stone platforms and almost drops his lance.

But Wade is a fast learner - he levels out and swings his mount around to face his oncoming opponent. Wade brings his lance up defensively, but he misses Acererak.

In the same instant, Acererak's lance nails Wade directly in the chest! It pierces his armor and impales him. Wade's avatar DISINTEGRATES.

Suddenly, Wade finds himself back in his starting position, sitting atop his mount on the stone platform. Acererak is back in his starting position, too.

DISEMBODIED VOICE
Round two! Prepare thyselves!
(beat)
Three! Two! One! Joust!

This time Wade is far more prepared. He launches his mount off the platform and flies directly at his opponent. Acererak does the same. Each wing beat propels them faster as they hurtle toward one another.

ON WADE - his eyes narrow in concentration as he raises his lance.

ON ACERERAK - his lips peel back in a rictus grin as he clutches his own lance with bony fingers.

A split second later, they both COLLIDE in the center of the arena. But this time Wade evades his opponent's attack, while his own lance finds its mark! It pierces Acererak through his torso and he disintegrates. **

Once again, both Wade and Acererak reappear at their starting positions.

DISEMBODIED VOICE (CONT'D)
Round three! Tiebreaker! Prepare thyselves!
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

DISEMBODIED VOICE (CONT'D)
(beat)
Three! Two! One! Joust!

Once again, both combatants launch off their platforms. But this time, Acererak swings his pterosaur into a high arc and disappears behind one of the other large floating platforms, causing Wade to lose sight of him. **

Wade swings his own mount around and goes after him, but Acererak seems to have disappeared.

Suddenly Wade hears a rush of wind as Acererak appears directly behind and above him, descending like a bat out of hell. He nearly lances Wade in the back, but Wade evades him by putting his own mount into a steep dive, hurtling toward the lava pit down below.

Acererak gives chase. Both he and his pterosaur scream bloody murder as they dive after Wade.

At the last possible moment, Wade pulls out of his dive, just before he plunges into the lava pit.

Acererak executes the same move, but then looks up to see that Wade has spun around in his saddle, so that he's now facing backwards.

Wade grabs his lance like a javelin and hurtles it down at his pursuer, catching him by surprise. The lance flies directly into Acererak's open mouth, impaling him through the skull! Acererak screams in anger and explodes!

DISEMBODIED VOICE (CONT'D)
Parzival is the winner!

Wade raises a fist in victory, then throws his arms around his winged steed in a bear hug. The pterosaur squawks in disapproval as we-- **

SMASH CUT TO:

INT. THE OASIS - THRONE ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wade suddenly finds himself back in the throne room, standing in front of ANORAK - James Halliday's avatar, who we recognize from the opening. ** **

Wade's jaw drops open. He seems unable to speak.

ANORAK
Congratulations, Parzival. By completing this challenge, you ** **
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ANORAK (CONT'D)
have proven your skill and **
bravery. And here is your reward. **

He releases Wade's hand. Wade looks down to see a COPPER KEY resting in his avatar's open palm.

WADE
The Copper Key. **

He glances back up at Anorak, just as he VANISHES. Wade **
now stands alone on the empty dais. **

Wade looks back down at the key. Takes a moment to process that he's just found what everyone in the world has been searching for... Then he turns the key over in his hand. On the other side he spots some text engraved into the metal. He reads it aloud:

WADE (CONT'D)
"What you seek lies hidden in the trash, on the deepest level of Dagorath." **

Wade hears a FANFARE OF TRUMPETS and a WINDOW appears in front of him, displaying THE SCOREBOARD - it looks just **
like the High Score List on an old arcade game. The **
Scoreboard has ten numbered slots. The name PARZIVAL is **
now at the top, with a score of 10,000 points. There's also a small COPPER KEY ICON beside his score. (The other **
nine positions on the Scoreboard are blank.) **

WADE (CONT'D)
Holy crap.

Suddenly a voice startles him.

FEMALE VOICE (O.S.)
Who the hell are you?

Wade turns to see the silhouette of a FEMALE AVATAR standing just inside the throne room entrance. Wade hides the key inside his armor and closes the Scoreboard.

FEMALE VOICE (CONT'D)
I said, who the hell are you? **

Wade turns to face her and draws his sword.

WADE
Who wants to know?

CONTINUED: (2)

The female avatar steps out of the shadows. She's devastatingly beautiful, wears scaled blue armor, a sword on her back and a set of blaster pistols on her hips. **

She walks toward him, her boots clocking on the stone floor. Wade takes a step backward as she ascends the steps of the dais and draws her own sword.

ART3MIS
I'm Art3mis.

She pronounces it "Artemis."

WADE
I'm Parzival... Did you follow me down here? **

She rolls her eyes.

ART3MIS
Give me a break. I've been coming here every night for over a month now. And this is the first time I've ever run into another avatar.

Without warning, Art3mis swings her sword around in a 360 arc and brings it down against Wade's sword as he parries. But their blades freeze a few inches apart, without touching. **

A message flashes on Wade's HUD: THIS IS A NO-PVP ZONE! **

Art3mis grins and returns her sword to the scabbard on her back. After a moment, Wade sheaths his sword, too.

ART3MIS (CONT'D)
So... How did you do?

WADE
Huh? **

She nods at the empty dais behind him.

ART3MIS
In your Joust against Acererak?

WADE
Oh... Not good. He won. **

She eyes him suspiciously.

CONTINUED: (3)

ART3MIS
Then how is it you're still alive? **
If he wins the joust, then you **
have to fight him. And your avatar **
looks pretty low level... **

WADE **
Looks can be deceiving. **

Wade heads for the exit, almost at a run. **

Her eyes narrow. She opens a window and pulls up the Scoreboard. The name of Wade's avatar is now at the top. **

Art3mis scowls, then begins to make an elaborate series of gestures while whispering in a strange tongue. She finishes casting her spell and a STONE WALL appears over the exit, blocking it.

Wade kicks the wall in frustration.

WADE (CONT'D)
Shit!

ART3MIS
You did it! How did YOU beat him? **
On your first try?! **

Wade gives her a sheepish grin. Busted.

WADE
What can I say? I got lucky.

Art3mis lets out a growl of pure frustration. Then she looks back at Wade, now with newfound respect.

ART3MIS
It's not luck. You just became the first person in history to obtain the Copper Key.
(reluctantly) **
Congratulations.

WADE
Thanks. Now why don't you let me leave?

She ignores the question.

ART3MIS
You're famous now, you do realize that? This changes everything.

CONTINUED: (4)

WADE
I haven't had much time to think about it yet.

ART3MIS
I have. I hope you're planning to keep your real identity a secret.

WADE
Of course I am. I'm not an idiot.

ART3MIS
Good. Because you now possess information that a lot of people would be willing to kill for. Everyone is going to want a piece of you now. Especially the Sixers. **
So watch your back.

WADE
Thanks for the advice, but I can take care of myself.

Art3mis nods, then casts another spell. The barrier over the exit disappears.

ART3MIS
Good luck finding the First Gate. I'll be right behind you...

WADE
You said you've been trying to beat Acererak for weeks. What makes you think you'll win tonight?

ART3MIS
Real competition always brings out **
the best in me.
(beat)
See ya around. **

Wade heads toward the exit.

WADE
See ya. **

She turns and ascends the dais. As soon as she reaches the top, Acererak reappears on his throne. **

Wade watches her for a moment, then runs out the exit. **

EXT. THE OASIS - FOREST CLEARING - NIGHT

Wade emerges from the tomb and sprints out of the forest.

As he runs, he opens a VIDEO WINDOW and flips past several news channels - all are airing a story about him.

He stops on a REPORTER pointing to the Scoreboard: **

REPORTER **
The entire world has spent the **
past five years searching the **
OASIS for the jeweled crown **
mentioned in James Halliday's **
will. Many people had started to **
believe that Halliday's contest **
was just an elaborate practical **
joke. But now, after five long **
years, an avatar named "Parzival" **
has appeared on Halliday's **
Scoreboard, after becoming the **
first to find the Copper Key! The **
first of the three hidden keys **
mentioned in Halliday's will-- **

Wade flips past a few more channels, then stops on-- **

NEWS ANCHOR **
--Innovative Online Industries is **
the world's leading technology **
company, both inside and outside **
of the OASIS. Over the past five **
years, IOI has invested billions **
of dollars in their search for **
Halliday's hidden crown. **
(beat) **
Nolan Sorrento, IOI's VP of OASIS **
Operations, is about to make a **
statement. This is the first time **
he's ever spoken to the media. **
Let's see what he has to say-- **

ON THE LIVE NEWS FEED - A room packed with REPORTERS. **
NOLAN SORRENTO steps up to the podium. He's a handsome **
man with perfect hair and teeth. Charismatic and **
confident. Cameras flash as he begins to speak: **

SORRENTO **
I address you tonight, not just as **
a representative of IOI, but as a **
citizen of humanity. As you know, **
we at IOI obviously have a vested **
interest in making sure that the **
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

SORRENTO (CONT'D)

OASIS falls into responsible hands. But there's a lot more than our business model at stake here. The OASIS is the most popular form of communication and entertainment in history. Most of humanity now spends more time in the OASIS than they do in the real world. If some loose cannon-- some irresponsible wildcard-- wins the contest and takes control of the OASIS, there could be devastating consequences for the global economy, and for life as we've come to know it. Rest assured, we at IOI are doing everything in our power to prevent this from happening, and we call upon all responsible OASIS users to assist us in our efforts to stop these gunters. Thank you for your time and continued support. **

The assembled reporters hurl a barrage of questions at Sorrento, but he ignores them and quickly exits. **

WADE CLOSES THE WINDOW, looking very unnerved. Then he hears an approaching ROAR overhead and looks up to see HUNDREDS OF SIXER GUNSHIPS passing overhead, flying in formation. Each one has the IOI logo stamped on its hull. **

Wade ducks out of sights and taps a PHONE ICON on his HUD, speed dialing Aech. Aech's avatar pops up in a VIDFEED WINDOW. He looks borderline hysterical. **

AECH

Z! **

WADE

(eyeing the gunships)

Hey, Aech. How's it going? **

AECH

How's it going?! My best friend just found the Copper Key, and he asks me "how's it going!" Holy shit, man! You're a god! A legend! You realize that? How did you--

WADE

Listen, I'll tell you about it later. The Sixers are here on Ludus. Somehow they tracked me to the key's hiding place. **

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

AECH
The key is here on Ludus?! **

WADE
I'm emailing you the coordinates now. You better get to the tomb before the Sixers do.

Aech is stunned.

AECH
Dude, this unbelievable. How can I ever repay you?

WADE **
You'll think of something. **

Wade glances up at the sky. More Sixer gunships are ** passing overhead. **

WADE **
Get moving, man. You're better at ** Joust than I am, so you shouldn't ** have any problem getting the key. **

AECH **
Joust? **

WADE **
Focus! Once you have the key, meet ** me on the planet Middletown. **

AECH **
Middletown? Why? **

Aech's eyes bulge as Wade takes out the Copper Key and ** reads the inscription: **

WADE (CONT'D) **
"What you seek likes hidden in the ** trash, on the deepest level of ** Daggorath." **
(beat) **
"Hidden in the trash." That has to ** be a reference to Halliday's first ** computer, a TRS-80. People used to ** call them "Trash 80s." And I think ** there's a replica of Halliday's ** TRS-80 on the planet Middletown. **

AECH **
There is! I was there a few years ** ago on a research trip. And there **
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

AECH (CONT'D)
was a game made for the TRS-80 **
called “Dungeons of Daggorath.” **
(beat) **
The First Gate must be hidden **
inside that game. **

Wade grins, realizing Aech is correct. **

WADE **
See? I knew there was a reason I **
called you. **

Aech laughs with pride and excitement. **

WADE **
See you soon. **

INT. THE OASIS - TRANSPORT TERMINAL - LATER

Wade sprints back into the transport terminal he visited earlier and jumps into an empty booth. He uses the touchscreen to select a planet named MIDDLETOWN. An automated voice reads off the PLANET DESCRIPTION:

AUTOMATED VOICE
The Planet Middletown is a
detailed recreation of James
Halliday’s hometown, just as it
was during his childhood in the
late 1980s. It includes a replica
of his boyhood home, which--

Wade hits SELECT on the planet. He now has more than enough money to pay the fare. **

AUTOMATED VOICE
Fare paid. Thank you.
Teleportation commencing.

Wade’s avatar suddenly vanishes.

INT. THE OASIS - BUS STATION - CONTINUOUS

Wade reappears inside a PHONE BOOTH. He steps out and looks around. He’s in what appears to be a small bus **
station. A few dozen NPCs (computer controlled avatars) mill around, all wearing 80s clothing and hairstyles.

Wade sprints out the exit.

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET MIDDLETOWN - CONTINUOUS

Wade emerges from the bus station to find himself in a small Midwestern town, circa 1986. He sprints down the street, gazing around him in wonder at his idyllic surroundings, so different from the world he knows.

Suddenly he hears a CHIME and opens a window displaying the SCOREBOARD. His avatar's name is still at the top, but now ART3MIS is in SECOND PLACE, with a score of 9,000 points. And AECH is in THIRD PLACE with a score of 8,000. They both have a Copper Key icon beside their score.

Wade smiles to himself and continues running.

EXT. THE OASIS - HALLIDAY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - LATER

Wade arrives outside a small two-story house on a tree-lined street. A landmark SIGN our front tells us that this is a replica of Halliday's childhood home.

INT. THE OASIS - HALLIDAY'S CHILDHOOD HOME - CONTINUOUS

Wade does a quick search to make sure the house is deserted. He pauses to study a FAMILY PHOTO, showing a teenaged Halliday with his stern faced MOTHER and FATHER.

In the LIVING ROOM Wade spots an ATARI 2600 by the TV.

INT. THE OASIS - HALLIDAY'S BEDROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Wade enters, then closes and locks the door. He looks around. There are shelves filled with encyclopedias, novels, role-playing games, and books on strategy. Then he spots an old wooden desk, on which sits a TRS-80 COLOR COMPUTER 2.

Wade sits down at the desk and digs through a box of old game cartridges. He finds one labeled "Dungeons of Daggorath." Then he pulls out the Copper Key.

WADE
"What you seek lies hidden in the trash, on the deepest level of Daggorath."

Wade slides the game cartridge into the TRS-80. The computer and its monitor suddenly transform into a GATE-SHAPED PORTAL. In its center is a COPPER LOCK.

CONTINUED:

WADE
The First Gate.

Wade puts his Copper Key into the lock's keyhole. The GATE DOORS SWING INWARD, revealing a FIELD OF STARS - like a portal leading into deep space.

Wade climbs up onto the desk. Then he takes a deep breath and jumps into the gate. His avatar disappears into it.

INT. THE OASIS - FIRST GATE

Wade finds himself standing inside a MAZE OF STONE CORRIDORS, lit by torches mounted on the walls. The passageways lead off in all directions. **

WE PULL BACK and see that he's in the center of a huge, complicated LABYRINTH. **

Wade picks up a STONE from the floor and uses it make an ARROW on the wall, marking his position. Then he runs north, deeper into the maze, making more marks on the walls as he goes. **

INT. THE OASIS - DUNGEONS OF DAGGORATH - LATER

When Wade descends a ladder, reaching the bottom level of the Labyrinth. He makes another X on the wall, then continues running, making his way to the center of the maze, where he finds... **

A STONE FOUNTAIN. In front of it is a pedestal, on which sits a SCROLL. Wade opens the scroll and reads it aloud: **

WADE
"The captain conceals the Second Key in a white house long neglected. But you can only blow the whistle once the trophies are all collected."

On Wade's HUD - WEALTH COUNTER also increase by $100,000. **

WADE
100,000 bucks?! That's what I'm talking about! **

INT. THE OASIS - HALLIDAY'S BEDROOM - CONTINUOUS

Wade suddenly finds himself standing back in Halliday's bedroom, staring at the TRS-80 on his desk. He's still holding the scroll in his hand. **

He studies it for a second, then runs out of the room.

EXT. THE OASIS - TRANSPORT TERMINAL - LATER **

Wade's avatar emerges from the transport terminal next to ** his school. He taps the LOGOUT icon on his HUD. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - NIGHT - CONTINUOUS **

He pulls off his visor and gloves. He looks like hammered ** shit. The past twenty-four hours have taken a huge toll ** on him. He barely reaches his sleeping bag before he ** passes out from sheer physical exhaustion. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - DAY

A narrow shaft of sunlight pours in through a small hole in the van's roof. Wade opens his eyes and checks his watch. It's after noon. **

Wade crawls out of his sleeping bag, then retrieves a PROTEIN BAR from inside a metal lunchbox and wolfs it down. Then he grabs his visor and haptic gloves.

EXT. THE OASIS - TRANSPORT TERMINAL - DAY

Wade's avatar reappears in the spot where he last logged out, just outside the Transport Terminal. He immediately checks the Scoreboard, which now looks like this:

HIGH SCORES:

1.	Parzival	110,000	[Gate Icon]
2.	Art3mis	109,000	[Gate Icon]
3.	Aech	108,000	[Gate Icon]
4.	Daito	107,000	[Gate Icon]
5.	Shoto	106,000	[Gate Icon]
6.	IOI-655321	5,000	[Key Icon]
7.	IOI-643187	5,000	[Key Icon]
8.	IOI-621671	5,000	[Key Icon]
9.	IOI-678324	5,000	[Key Icon]
10.	IOI-637330	5,000	[Key Icon]

CONTINUED:

Wade stares at the numbers in shock for a moment. Then he focuses on the new names in 4th and 5th place... **

WADE **
Daito and Shoto. Who are you? **

He quickly opens another window and starts flipping through various newsfeed channels, all of which are running stories about the changes to the Scoreboard.

NEWS ANCHOR
--more stunning developments! In the past twenty-four hours, five gunters have managed to clear the first gate! There appears to be a point bonus for being among the first five avatars to reach the Copper Key-- **

Wade flips to another channel, where a REPORTER is interviewing OGDEN MORROW (60s), who looks (and behaves) like a cross between Einstein and Santa Clause.

REPORTER
-live via satellite is Mr. Ogden Morrow, the co-creator of the OASIS and James Halliday's closest friend. Morrow sold all of his OASIS stock and retired over a decade ago. This is his first interview in over five years. Thank you so much for joining us today, Mr. Morrow.

OGDEN MORROW
No problem.

REPORTER
Are you surprised to see those names appear on the Scoreboard after all these years?

OGDEN MORROW
Surprised? "Excited" is probably a better word.

REPORTER
These avatars in the top five slots on the Scoreboard - do you think they're working together?

CONTINUED: (2)

OGDEN MORROW
I doubt it. Gunters always work alone. It's part of their code. **

REPORTER
This network has emailed all five of these gunters to request an interview. Do you think they'll come forward? **

OGDEN MORROW
I doubt it. Anyone smart enough to accomplish what they have should know better than to risk everything by revealing their true identities. **

REPORTER
Do you have any predictions about what changes we might see on the scoreboard in the days to come?

OGDEN MORROW
Anything is possible. I just hope that one of those gunters manages to clear the other two gates and locate Halliday's crown, before the Sixers cheat them out of it. **

REPORTER
You believe that IOI is cheating? **

OGDEN MORROW
They've spent millions of dollars to create their own private army of avatars to search for the crown. That's cheating in my book. The last thing Jim would have wanted is for the OASIS to fall into the hands of a soulless corporation. **

REPORTER
But Mr. Morrow, IOI donates billions to charity every year. They only want to ensure the stability of the OASIS going forward. The gunters are just out for themselves, and no one even knows who they really are. IOI is working to make the OASIS, and the world, a better place. **

CONTINUED: (3)

Morrow laughs, almost amused. **

OGDEN MORROW
Bullshit! IOI has an agenda, all **
right, but that isn't it. **
(beat) **
The OASIS is like a drug, and the **
whole world is addicted to it. **
Like any other drug pusher, IOI **
wants total control the supply. **

REPORTER **
Forgive me, Mr. Morrow. But you **
sound like a conspiracy nut. **

OGDEN MORROW **
Oh? Then allow me to remind your **
viewers that IOI owns this **
network. **
(quick beat) **
Did they tattoo a UPC code on your **
ass when they hired you to sit **
there and spout their corporate **
propaganda? **

The reporter glances nervously at someone off camera.

OGDEN MORROW (CONT'D)
Quick! You better cut me off
before I say anything else!

Morrow breaks into gales of laughter, just as the network cuts his satellite feed. The reporter quickly regroups.

REPORTER
Unfortunately that's all the time
we have to speak with Mr. Morrow.
Now let's go back to Judy, who's
standing by with a panel of
Halliday scholars--

Wade's PHONE RINGS. He closes the newsfeed window and checks his CALLER ID. It reads: NOLAN SORRENTO - HEAD OF **
OPERATIONS - INNOVATIVE ONLINE INDUSTRIES. **

Wade hesitates, then taps the ANSWER icon on his HUD.

A VIDFEED WINDOW opens, displaying the smiling face of NOLAN SORRENTO, the head of the Sixers. **

SORRENTO **
Good afternoon, Parzival. Thank **
you for taking my call. **

CONTINUED: (4)

WADE **
What do you want, Mr. Sorrento? **

SORRENTO **
I'd like you to join me in a brief **
holochat session. **

WADE **
I have no interest in talking to **
you. Or anyone at IOI. **

SORRENTO **
Don't be so sure. My company has **
authorized me to make you a very **
generous business proposal. If you **
decline, we intend to make the **
same offer to Art3mis, Aech, and **
each of the other gunters who have **
already cleared the First Gate. **
(beat) **
Don't you think you should at **
least hear our offer? **

WADE **
Why bother with a holochat **
session? Just tell me now, over **
the phone. **

SORRENTO **
We'd like to give you a virtual **
tour of our facilities first. **
(taunting) **
Come on, Parzival. We can't harm a **
hologram of your avatar. You have **
nothing to be afraid of. **

WADE **
I never said I was afraid of **
anything. **

A flashing HOLOGRAPHIC CHAT INVITATION appears on Wade's HUD. He stares at it for a moment, then taps it.

A "HOLOCHAT INITIATED" message appears on Wade's HUD and his surroundings suddenly appear to change. (A Holochat is a bit like an out of body experience in the OASIS.)

INT. THE OASIS - SHUTTLECRAFT - HOLOCHAT SESSION

Wade's avatar appears as a TRANSPARENT HOLOGRAM. He's aboard a small SHUTTLECRAFT gliding through SPACE.

CONTINUED:

Sorrento's avatar stands beside him, but he appears solid - not as a hologram like Wade.

Through the shuttle's large main window we see HUNDREDS OF PLANETS of all sizes and colors, hanging motionless in space. It's reminiscent of Kandinsky's "Several Circles."

SORRENTO
Thanks for accepting my invitation. **

Wade doesn't respond. Sorrento motions out the window, where a massive CHROME PLANET now looms directly ahead. There are canyons cut into the planet's curved surface to create the IOI company logo.

SORRENTO
This is our base of operations inside the OASIS... IOI-One.

The shuttlecraft swings into orbit around the planet and begins to skim along its equator. The surface is covered with armories, bunkers, warehouses, and vehicle hangars. They pass over dozens of AIRFIELDS, where rows of gleaming gunships, spacecraft, and mechanized battle tanks stand ready for use.

SORRENTO (CONT'D)
Impressive, no? As you can see, we're prepared to fight a war. And make no mistake, that's exactly what Halliday's contest is. A war for control of the OASIS. And we ** want you to be on the winning ** side... **

Wade nods politely, but doesn't respond. **

The IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX swing into view ahead of them. It consists of three mirror-surfaced TOWERS. Two rectangular skyscrapers flanking a circular one. Seen from above, these three buildings formed the I-O-I logo.

EXT. THE OASIS - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME

The shuttlecraft sets down on the roof of the circular tower. Wade's avatar follows Sorrento off the shuttle and into a GLASS ELEVATOR adjacent to the landing pad.

INT. THE OASIS - ELEVATOR - CONTINUOUS

Sorrento and Wade stare out at the IOI Complex as the elevator descends. **

WADE **
I read that you used to be a video game designer, like Halliday. Is that why IOI put you in charge? **

Sorrento nods. **

SORRENTO **
You ever play any of my games? **

WADE **
Yeah. Every last one of them. **

SORRENTO **
What did you think? **

WADE **
They were okay. A little too easy to beat. **

Sorrento grins. **

SORRENTO **
Coming from you, I'll take that as a compliment. **

The elevator stops and they get off at the 101st floor. **

INT. THE OASIS - IOI OOLOGY DIVISION - CONTINUOUS

Sorrento leads Wade into a huge open room, containing a vast sea of CUBICLES, each containing a single person strapped into a high-end OASIS IMMERSION RIG.

SORRENTO
Welcome to IOI's Oology Division. This could be your team.

WADE
Wow. Will I get my own cubicle? **

Sorrento grins, noting his sarcasm. **

SORRENTO
Of course not. You'll have your own private office. Just like mine. Follow me and I'll show you. **

INT. THE OASIS - SORRENTO'S OFFICE - MOMENTS LATER

An imposing office with a stunning view. Sorrento offers **
Wade a chair, then takes a seat behind his desk. **

SORRENTO **
As you can see, we've covered all **
our bases. We're going to win. **

WADE **
Yeah. You guys have been doing a **
bang-up job so far. Bravo. Now, **
why is it that we're talking **
again? Oh, right. You have no clue **
where the First Gate is, and you **
need my help to find it. **

Sorrento laughs. **

SORRENTO **
I like you, kid. You're bright, **
resourceful, and relentless. **
That's why we need you. **
(beat) **
IOI wants to hire you as a **
consultant, to assist us in our **
search for the crown. You'll have **
everything at your disposal. **
Money, weapons, ships, artifacts. **
You name it. And you'll be in **
charge of the entire division, **
second in command only to myself. **

WADE **
Sounds like a pretty sweet deal. **

SORRENTO **
Oh, it gets even better. In **
exchange for your services, we're **
willing to pay you fifteen million **
dollars a year, with a ten million **
dollar signing bonus up front. And **
if and when you help us find the **
crown, you'll get a twenty-five **
million dollar bonus. **

Sorrento waits for a reaction, but Wade remains stoic. **

SORRENTO **
So? What do you say? **

Wade shakes his head. **

CONTINUED:

WADE
Sorry. I'm not interested.

SORRENTO
Why? We're really no different, you and I. We have the same goal.

WADE
What's that? To take over the OASIS and ruin it? Turn it into some corporate theme park with the IOI logo plastered on everything?

SORRENTO
We'll make you rich. Why do you care what happens to the OASIS?

WADE
Because I grew up inside it. It's where I've spent most of life. The real world is a hell hole. The OASIS is the only place where I've ever felt safe or content.

Sorrento gives Wade a sympathetic look.

SORRENTO (CONT'D)
Trust me, son. You should take this offer. While you can.

WADE
I'm not your son. And I don't trust you. So forget it.

Wade stands up.

SORRENTO
I'm warning you. If you're not with us, you're against us. We'll have to view you as a threat to our objective.

WADE
Good. That's what I am.

Wade taps his logout icon and his hologram begins to fade out. Sorrento shakes his head and lets out a heavy sigh.

SORRENTO
Stupid move, kid.

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - CONTINUOUS

Wade pulls off his visor and gloves. He looks around at the van's darkened interior, replaying his conversation with Sorrento in his head. A second later... **

A MASSIVE EXPLOSION rocks his hideout. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - NIGHT

Wade climbs up on the pile of abandoned vehicles next to the stacks. From here, he can see the devastation caused by the explosion. The stack containing THE SHIPPING CONTAINER WHERE HE LIVES HAS BEEN TOTALLY DESTROYED, as have all of the stacks surrounding it. The entire area is engulfed in smoke and flames. **

Wade's face contorts into a mask of horror and rage. **

In the distance, screams and shouts can be heard as the survivors flee to safety.

Wade runs straight toward the flaming wreckage, but two male BYSTANDERS grab him and pull him back.

BYSTANDER
Are you crazy! No one is coming out of there alive!

Wade tries to pull free, but they hold onto him and drag him further back. Then Wade looks up at the sky, suddenly realizing that someone may be watching him. **

Wade finally breaks free of the bystanders. Then turns and runs back toward his hideout, as we hear SIRENS approaching in the distance. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - MOMENTS LATER

Wade scrambles back into the van and locks the door. Then he curls up into a frightened ball. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - NIGHT

An aerial view of the devastation. We see a large CRATER where Wade's stack stood. The raging fire weakens the scaffolding of a nearby stack. We hear a horrific screech of rending metal as it COLLAPSES, bringing down two more adjacent stacks. **

CONTINUED:

Inside the inferno, propane and heating fuel tanks begin to DETONATE in smaller explosions.

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S HIDEOUT - SAME TIME

Wade sits on the floor, hugging his knees, flinching at the sound of each distant explosion. **

Eventually, his anguish seems to transform into rage, and single-minded thirst for revenge.

He gets to his feet, then grabs his gloves and visor and quickly logs back in to the OASIS.

EXT. THE OASIS - MIDDLETOWN - NIGHT

Wade's avatar reappears outside the transport terminal on Middletown - the same spot where he got Sorrento's call. It's the middle of the night and the area is deserted.

Wade calls Aech. He answers on the first ring. His avatar appears in a vidfeed window.

AECH
Where the hell have you been, man? **
I been trying to call you--

WADE **
Somehow the Sixers found out my **
real name and address. They set **
off a bomb. They tried to kill me. **

AECH **
Oh my god - are you okay? Are you **
sure it was them? **

WADE **
I'm okay. And yes, I'm sure. You **
better get moving, Aech. Sorrento **
might come after you next. **

AECH **
Don't worry about me. I always **
stay mobile. Listen, I need you to **
meet me in my chatroom, right now. **
It's important-- **

WADE **
Okay. Hold on-- **

CONTINUED:

But Aech has already hung up. A second later, a CHATROOM INVITATION FROM AECH appears on his HUD. He hits accept. A TWO-DIMENSIONAL DOOR OPENS in the air beside him, revealing a staircase leading down. He walks through it. **

INT. THE OASIS - AECH'S CHATROOM **

Wade's avatar descends the staircase into Aech's chatroom, which looks like a CONFERENCE ROOM. **

Aech and Art3mis are both there waiting for him, along with TWO JAPANESE AVATARS dressed as SAMURAI. They are SHOTO (age 15 and short) and DAITO (age 18 and tall). **

Aech runs over to greet him. **

AECH **
There he is! **

ART3MIS **
Good to see you again. **

Wade nods to Art3mis, then motions to Daito and Shoto. **

WADE **
Who are these guys? **

AECH **
Shoto and Daito. 4th and 5th place on the Scoreboard. They're Japanese. **

WADE **
(off their outfits) **
No kidding? **

Daito and Shoto bow to Wade. Wade returns the gesture, but eyes them warily. **

WADE **
No offense, but how do we know you're not Sixer spies? **

Daito and Shoto exchange amused looks. **

DAITO **
We're not. **

SHOTO **
We despise the Sixers. **

CONTINUED:

ART3MIS **
I can vouch for that. I've run **
into these two before, at various **
gunter hangouts. They're legit. **

WADE **
Fair enough. But why did you **
invite all of us here, Aech? **

AECH **
Becuase we need to talk tactics. **
The Sixers started clearing the **
first gate half an hour ago. Now **
they're filing their avatars **
through it one after another, like **
a freaking conga line. **

WADE **
How the hell did they find it? **

DAITO **
By cheating. They're tracking our **
movements, using a magical **
artifact called Fyndoro's Tablet **
of Finding. A one of kind device. **

SHOTO **
All they have to do is write an **
avatar's name on the tablet, then **
it displays the name of the planet **
they're currently on. **

DAITO **
When the Sixers see one of our **
scores increase, they can use that **
tablet to locate the key we just **
found. Or a gate we just cleared. **

They all let this news sink in. **

WADE **
How do you know all this? **

AECH **
It's all over the news. Some ex- **
Sixer leaked it on the message **
boards. **

WADE **
Son of a bitch. **

CONTINUED: (2)

ART3MIS **
So now, no matter what we do, the **
Sixers will always be one step **
behind us. **

Wade clenches his fists in frustration. **

WADE **
Exactly. One step behind us. The **
Sixers have an endless supply of **
money, magic items, weapons, **
ships, and avatars. And there are **
thousands of them, all working **
together as a team. But we still **
beat them to the Copper Key and **
the First Gate. Without cheating. **
(beat) **
If we work together, we can give **
them a run for their money. **

DAITO **
(uneasy) **
What are you proposing? **

Wade turns to Aech. Aech nods his approval. **

WADE **
I think the five of us should join **
forces. Work as a team to reach **
the crown. It's our only chance. **
(beat) **
We can split the prize five ways. **
That's still more money than any **
of us could spend in a lifetime. **

Daito turns to Shoto and they briefly confer. Then they **
turn and bow in unison. **

DAITO **
My brother and I accept your **
offer. We wouldn't have thought to **
look for the Copper Key on Ludus **
if we didn't know you and Aech **
went to school there. **

ART3MIS **
Count me in, too. **

Wade opens a window displaying their latest clue: **

The captain conceals the Second Key **
in a white house long neglected **

CONTINUED: (3)

But you can only blow the whistle once the trophies are all collected **

WADE **
All right then. Any theories about **
where the “white house long **
neglected” might be? **

Everyone is silent for a moment, then Art3mis speaks up. **

ART3MIS **
The “captain” in the first line **
refers to John Draper, a famous **
1970s era hacker known by the **
alias “Captain Crunch.” Halliday **
was a big fan of his work. **

She opens a window displaying a PHOTO of Draper holding a **
box of Captain Crunch. The cereal box reads: FREE TOY **
WHISTLE INSIDE! **

WADE **
Of course! Draper was famous for **
using a toy whistle that came in **
boxes of Captain Crunch cereal. **
That must be the “whistle” **
mentioned in line three of the **
clue-- **

Aech clears his throat. **

AECH **
That’s very interesting, nerds. **
But it doesn’t tell us where the **
Second Key is hidden... **

Daito nods to Shoto. **

SHOTO **
We think the answer is in line two **
- the key is hidden in a “white **
house long neglected.” There are **
ten replicas of the White House in **
Washington D.C. on various **
planets. Daito and I have already **
searched all of them, but we found **
no sign of the Second Key. **

AECH **
So we’re looking for a different **
“white house.” **

CONTINUED: (4)

WADE
Right. One that has been “long neglected.”

The other four nod in agreement.

WADE
Okay, then let’s get to work. We’ll split. Everyone follow their instincts - they’ve served us well so far. If one of us finds the house, we’ll contact the others with its location. Agreed?

ALL
Agreed.

Daito and Shoto bow again, then exit the chatroom. Art3mis gives Wade a wink, then nods at Aech.

ART3MIS
See ya ‘round the playground, fellas.

She exits, too. Aech catches Wade staring after her.

WADE
What?

He grins, embarrassed.

AECH
Wait, who does this remind you of?

Aech does an impression of Wade, sighing and batting his eyelashes like a silent film star. Wade rolls his eyes.

AECH
You do realize that “she” may not even <u>be</u> a girl. For all you know, she’s a hairy fat guy named Chuck who lives in his mom’s basement.

WADE
I know that. I’m not an idiot--

Across the room, a STACK OF COMIC BOOKS suddenly slides off an end table. Aech and Wade freeze.

WADE
What the hell was that?

CONTINUED: (5)

AECH **
I don’t know. Maybe a software **
glitch or something? **

WADE **
I've never seen a chatroom glitch **
like that. Could someone else be **
in here? An invisible avatar, **
eavesdropping on us? **

AECH **
No way. You're being paranoid. No **
one can enter this chatroom **
without my permission. **

WADE **
(still freaked out) **
Right. **

AECH **
Where are you gonna go? **

Wade thinks for a second. **

WADE **
The last place the Sixers will **
ever think to look for me. **
(beat) **
You’ve got connections on the **
OASIS black market, right? **

AECH **
You could say that, yeah... **

WADE **
I gotta get out of Oklahoma City. **
I’ll gonna a new identity to **
travel. **

AECH **
No sweat. I know just the guy. **
(beat) **
And you better buy your avatar **
some new weapons, too. I think **
we’re in for a hell of fight. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE’S HIDEOUT - LATER **

Wade pulls off his visor and grabs a backpack. He begins **
to pack up his OASIS gear, food, and other belongings. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - THE STACKS - LATER **

Wade hoists his backpack and quickly makes his way out of the stacks. In all the chaos, he avoids being seen. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - OKLAHOMA CITY - STREETS - NIGHT **

Wade makes his way through the crowded city streets. There are HOMELESS PEOPLE everywhere, huddling together for warmth. Many of them wear outdated visors and gloves, accessing the OASIS via the city's free wireless. **

Everywhere you look, there are ELECTRONIC BILLBOARDS advertising INNOVATIVE ONLINE INDUSTRIES. **

Wade pushes through a gauntlet of PANHANDLERS, then runs down an alley and enters a seedy looking PIZZA PARLOR. **

INT. REAL WORLD - PIZZA PARLOR - CONTINUOUS **

A large KOREAN MAN, covered in tattoos and piercings, sits behind the counter, watching a 3D movie on a tablet computer. Wade nervously walks up to him. **

WADE **
Hi. I'd like to buy three extra large pizzas, with pineapple and anchovies. **

The Korean Man studies Wade for a moment, then nods. **

KOREAN MAN **
Follow me. **

INT. REAL WORLD - BACK ROOM - MOMENTS LATER **

The Korean Man opens the door and leads Wade inside. This room is dark, except for the light coming off a custom OASIS console on the floor. A young BOY, also Korean, sits in a battered recliner. He pushes up his visor. **

KOREAN MAN **
Choy-Boy. You got a customer. **

The man leaves, closing the door. Choy-Boy sizes Wade up. **

WADE **
A mutual friend told me that you're the guy to see about getting a new name? **

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Choy-Boy smiles, suddenly all business. **

CHOY-BOY **
Always nice to meet a new **
customer. So you need a new **
identity, eh? **

WADE **
Yes. Linked to my fingerprints and **
retinal patterns. **

Choy-boy scratches his chin. **

CHOY-BOY **
That's gonna be expensive. Fifty **
thousand. Up front. **

WADE **
Fine. **

Choy-boy is surprised by Wade's response. He hands Wade a **
PAY SCANNER. Wade presses his thumb to a plate on the **
top, then holds the device in front of his eyes. It scans **
his retinas, then Choy-Boy takes it and checks the **
readout: $50,000 - PAID **

Choy-Boy grins and lowers his visor. His gloved fingers **
begin to type in the air, on a non-existent keyboard. **

CHOY-BOY **
What happened. You rob a bank? **
Kill somebody? **

Wade doesn't answer. **

CHOY-BOY **
Not a big talker. Okay. No **
worries, my friend. You're about **
to be reborn. **

Wade watches as Choy-Boy creates his new identity. **

CHOY-BOY **
You need anything else while **
you're here? Fake passport? **
Transit papers? Access keycards? **
Forged documents of any kind? You **
name it, I can get it for you. **

Wade stares through him. **

WADE **
What kind of access cards? **

INT. REAL WORLD - BUS STATION - LATER **

It's like a refugee center in here, packed with haggard travelers and homeless people, all trying to stay warm. **

Wade walks over to TICKET KIOSK and purchases a one-way ticket to Columbus, Ohio. **

ON THE TOUCHSCREEN - As it displays Wade's photo, along with the name of his new identity: BRYCE LYNCH. The kiosk spits out his ticket and Wade grabs it.

EXT. REAL WORLD - BUS STATION - NIGHT

Wade stands in a line of PASSENGERS who are filing onto a DOUBLE-DECKER BUS with SOLAR PANELS mounted on the roof.

EXT. REAL WORLD - BUS - MOVING - MORNING

The bus rolls through a giant field of WIND TURBINES, filled with TENTS and other makeshift dwellings.

INT. REAL WORLD - BUS - MOVING - DAY **

The bus is filled to capacity, and nearly all of the passengers wear visors and are logged in to the OASIS. **

But Wade is staring out the window, at the receding Oklahoma City skyline. This is the first time he's ever left the city limits. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - BUS - MOVING - MONTAGE OF SHOTS **

The bus rolls across the grim landscape, passing through several overcrowded, crumbling cities. Tulsa, St. Louis, Indianapolis. Finally, Columbus appears on the horizon, glittering like Oz at the end of the yellow brick road. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - COLUMBUS, OHIO - DAWN

The bus rolls through Columbus. It's in better shape than Oklahoma City, but still crawling with homeless people. **

As the bus enters the skyscraper-filled downtown area, Wade looks out the window in awe, at a MONOLITHIC BLACK SKYSCRAPER towering above those around it. Its bears a giant OASIS SYSTEMS logo. Just a few blocks later, Wade **

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

spots the Innovative Online Industries skyscraper complex - three mirrored-glass towers that form the I-O-I logo. **

WADE **
(quoting) **
"Keep your friends close, and your enemies closer." **

EXT. REAL WORLD - COLUMBUS BUS STATION - LATER **

The bus pulls in to the station and Wade files off with the other passengers, shielding his eyes from the sun. He immediately hails an AUTOMATED TAXI. **

EXT. REAL WORLD - APARTMENT BUILDING - DAY **

The taxi pulls up and Wade steps out. He gazes up at an old Hilton Hotel converted into an apartment building. **

INT. REAL WORLD - APARTMENT BUILDING LOBBY - CONTINUOUS **

Wade walks into the lobby, which contains an elaborate SECURITY CHECKPOINT. An AUTOMATED RENTAL KIOSK reads: EFFICIENCY APARTMENTS FOR RENT - A GUNTER'S PARADISE! **

Wade taps the kiosk touchscreen. A 3-D view of a MODEL APARTMENT appears on the display. An automated voice begins to list off its features: **

AUTOMATED VOICE **
Our one room efficiency apartments feature a high speed connection to the main OASIS server vault, located just a few blocks away, ensuring the fastest OASIS connection possible. The built-in OASIS immersion rig and state of the art security systems ensure-- **

WADE **
I'll take it. **

He taps the RENT button on his HUD. **

AUTOMATED VOICE **
Congratulations on your new apartment, Mr. Bryce Lynch. You can move in immediately! **

CONTINUED:

Wade steps into the METAL SECURITY CAGE while a machine scans his retinas and body. Then the cage doors open, allowing him to continue to a bank of elevators. **

AUTOMATED VOICE **
Security scan complete. Welcome to your new home, Mr. Lynch! **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S FLOOR - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade steps of the elevator and walks down the deserted hallway. He stops at an armor-plated door labeled #4211. He presses a thumb to a security plate. His retinas are scanned again and the door unlocks. Wade steps inside. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S APARTMENT - CONTINUOUS **

The tiny apartment is empty, except for a high-end OASIS IMMERSION RIG in the center of the room, complete with a HAPTIC CHAIR and a state-of-the-art OMNI-DIRECTIONAL TREADMILL embedded in the floor. An ergonomic kitchen unit is built into one wall, opposite a small bathroom. The only window overlooks a view of downtown Columbus. **

Wade turns and locks the door, then he collapses against it and slides to the floor, sighing in relief. **

CUT TO: **

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI CONFERENCE ROOM - DAY **

Sorrento stands at the head of a long conference table, around which a DOZEN IOI SUITS are seated. These are top-level shareholders - the only people Sorrento answers to. **

SORRENTO **
Thank you for joining me today, gentleman. I'm excited to update you on our progress. **

Sorrento activates a VIEWSCREEN displaying the top five names on the Scoreboard. Parzival (Wade) is crossed out. **

SORRENTO **
As you know, we've already neutralized one of the primary threats. And we've obtained the following data on the other four. **

CONTINUED:

The viewscreen displays a DOSSIER on AECH. His school file PHOTO is a pic of PEE-WEE HERMAN. **

SORRENTO **
We still know very little about the gunter known as Aech. His school records contain a fake name and mailing address. His school photo is also bogus. Obviously. **

A MAP appears next to Aech's dossier, with RED DOTS over Boston, DC, New York, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. **

SORRENTO **
As you can see, he stays on the move. His access points are all over the east coast. He never stays put long enough for us to reach him. Clever boy. **
(beat) **
We've had better luck with the other three. They all access the OASIS using an Internet connection owned by one of our subsidiaries. This has allowed us to locate and identify all three of them... **

The viewscreen changes to display a dossier on ART3MIS. Next to an image of her avatar is a real-world photo of a YOUNG WOMAN with the same appearance, with one major difference: she has a REDDISH BIRTHMARK covering the left half of her face. (Known as a "port wine stain.") **

SORRENTO **
Artemis. Real name: Samantha Evelyn Cook. Age 22. Canadian citizen. She lives alone in a suburb of Vancouver. We've just placed her home under twenty-four hour surveillance. Live video and audio feeds are now up on the Oology Division intranet. **

The viewscreen changes to display side-by-side dossiers on DAITO and SHOTO. The photos show TWO JAPANESE BOYS, who look almost nothing like their avatars. **

SORRENTO **
Shoto. Real name: Akihide Karatsu, age 13. He lives with his mother in Osaka, Japan. And his partner Daito. Real name: Toshiro Yoshiaki, age 19. He lives alone **
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (2)

SORRENTO (CONT'D)
in Tokyo. We have both of these **
individuals under surveillance **
now, too. **

Sorrento sighs, staring at the viewscreen. **

SORRENTO **
Unfortunately, none of them are **
willing to work with us. We're **
dealing with a bunch of idealistic **
children here. But they are **
threats, nonetheless. **
(beat) **
Our operatives are in position in **
Vancouver, Osaka, and Tokyo. If I **
give the order, Art3mis, Daito, or **
Shoto can be neutralized within **
thirty minutes. **

One of the executives speaks up. **

IOI SHAREHOLDER **
Is that your next move? **

FRUSTRATED SHAREHOLDER **
(stands up) **
What are we waiting for?! **

SORRENTO **
Gentleman, please. We're not quite **
there yet. First, we need to see **
if one of them will lead us to the **
Second Key. **

The Frustrated Shareholder calms himself under Sorrento's **
stern glare. Sorrento turns to study the scoreboard as we **

CUT TO: **

INT. THE OASIS - PLANET INCIPIO - DAY **

Wade steps out of a transport booth on a crowded street, **
lined with STORES and SHOPS, selling every virtual item **
imaginable. This planet is one giant shopping mall. **

Wade checks his WEALTH COUNTER. He's still got $80,000. **

He sprints toward an enormous shop - AVATAR OUTFITTERS. **
The sign boasts: WE HAVE EVERYTHING! **

INT. THE OASIS - AVATAR OUTFITTERS - MOMENTS LATER **

A huge room, with shelves stretching off into infinity, **
filled with all manner of guns, swords, armor, magic **
wands, rings, and other strange items we can't identify. **

Wade steps up to the counter and is greeted by a cheerful **
NPC named BORIS. **

BORIS **
Welcome to Avatar Outfitters. My **
name is Boris. What can I get for **
you today, sir? **

Wade looks around, rattling off items as he sees them. **

WADE **
A suit of powered armor. A pair of **
Yun-fat autofire blaster pistols. **
Those anti-grav jetboots. A vorpal **
bastard sword. A Ring of Magic **
Resistance. And some Gauntlets of **
Giant Strength. **

Boris begins to run around the shop, collecting the **
various items and laying them on the counter. **

BORIS **
You seem like the sort of customer **
who might appreciate one of my **
specialty items. It costs a pretty **
penny, but it's worth it... **

He holds up a shiny new QUARTER. **

Wade studies it, intrigued. **

EXT. THE OASIS - WADE'S X-WING - OUTER SPACE - NIGHT **

Wade now sits in the cockpit of his new X-WING FIGHTER, **
cruising through the starry void between the thousands of
OASIS planets. **

He taps the phone icon on his HUD. Aech appears on his
cockpit display screen. Aech is aboard his own spaceship, **
and Art3mis is sitting beside him in the cockpit. **

CONTINUED:

ART3MIS
Parzival! We found the Second Key!
It's hidden on the planet Frobozz
in Sector 7.

INTERCUT WITH:

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET FROBOZZ - WHITE HOUSE

A dilapidated white house. The paint is peeling and the windows are all boarded up. Art3mis stands on the porch, both her guns drawn, scanning the sky nervously. Wade's avatar is visible in an open vidfeed window beside her.

ART3MIS (CONT'D)
The "white house, long neglected" is from an old text adventure game called Zork. There's a recreation of it on this planet. You'll find the key in the kitchen of the white house. Study the game on your way here and you'll know what to do - but hurry. The Sixers will arrive any minute. **

WADE (V.O.) **
I'm on my way! **

Art3mis hangs up and the window disappears. **

A few seconds later, the front door of the white house BURSTS OPEN and Aech runs out, gasping for breath. He holds a copy of the SECOND KEY. It's made of Jade. **

AECH
Got it! Let's go!

They both sprint across the field and run up the ramp of Aech's ship. The ramp closes and the ship lifts off. **

EXT. THE OASIS - FROBOZZ - LATER

Wade's ship approaches Frobozz, where hundreds of SIXER GUNSHIPS are already converging on the planet. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Wade watches as the Sixer gunships descend on the planet, breaking off into groups to scan the entire surface.

CONTINUED:

WADE
Not good. Not good.

He banks to avoid the Sixers, then heads toward the surface. His ship disappears through the cloud layer.

EXT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Daito stands guard in front of the white house. The Kurosawa is parked a short distance away.

Daito looks up nervously and sees hundreds of Sixer Gunships passing overheard. A few dozen them suddenly break formation and begin to fly straight at him.

Daito raises his wrist to talk into a COMLINK:

DAITO
Shoto, hurry up! They've spotted our ship!

SHOTO (V.O.)
I've got it! I'll be right out.

Two dozen Sixer gunships land in the field in front of Daito, and heavily armed Sixer troops pour out. Each Sixer avatar wears a suit of POWERED ARMOR and carries a giant PLASMA RIFLE.

Wearing a look of grim resolve, Daito sheaths his samurai sword and then takes out a METAL CYLINDER, about the size of a small flashlight. He holds the device over his head and presses a small button on it.

DAITO
Urutoraman!

His avatar instantly changes into ULTRAMAN, the glowing-eyed red-and-silver Japanese superhero. As his avatar transforms, he also grows 150 feet tall.

The Sixer troops closing in on him freeze in their tracks, staring up in terror as Ultraman Daito snatches two gunships out of the sky and smashes them together like toys. He drops the flaming wreckage and begins to swat other Sixer gunships out of the sky.

The ships that escape his grasp bank around and spray him with laser fire, but it deflects harmlessly off his armored alien skin. Daito lets out a booming laugh that echoes across the landscape. Then he makes a cross with

CONTINUED:

his arms, and an ENERGY BEAM blasts forth from his hands, vaporizing half a dozen gunships.

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S STARSHIP - SAME TIME

Wade's ship emerges through the clouds, directly above the white house. He takes in the chaotic battle below, where the Sixer ground troops and ships are swarming around Daito's giant alien form.

WADE
Holy shit!

Wade uses the chaos as a distraction. He banks around and lands his ship behind the white house, out of sight.

EXT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Wade jumps out of his ship and runs over to the back of the white house. He crawls through an open window. **

EXT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Daito turns and sweeps the beam over the Sixer ground forces around him, frying them like terrified ants. **

Shoto emerges from the house and raises his comlink.

SHOTO
Daito! I've got the key! Let's go!

The Sixers spot Shoto, and redirect some of their fire at his avatar. Shoto makes a mad dash for his ship.

Daito moves to cover him, still firing energy beams to keep the Sixers at bay. The ground shakes with each of his massive footfalls. The Sixers scatter. **

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS - SAME TIME **

Sorrento stands at the center of IOI operations, **
surrounded by assistants. He's studying a row of vidfeed **
windows suspended in the air around him, displaying the **
battle with Daito's avatar. **

An assistant turns to him: **

CONTINUED:

ASSISTANT **
Sir, Daito’s avatar is too **
powerful. Our troops are suffering **
heavy losses and they’re unable to **
reach the key... **
(waits for a beat) **
Sir? **

Sorrento rubs his temples, then sighs heavily. He hates **
having to do this... **

SORRENTO **
Neutralize the operator. **

INT. REAL WORLD - APARTMENT - TOKYO - SAME TIME

Daito’s real world identity, TOSHIRO YOSHIAKI, sits in an **
elaborate haptic rig, logged in to the OASIS. Through his
open balcony doors we see the glittering Tokyo skyline.

Daito’s hands movements mirror those of his avatar inside
the OASIS, as he fights off the Sixers as Ultraman Daito.

THE DOOR OF THE APARTMENT SUDDENLY BURSTS INWARD, flying **
off the hinges, and FOUR MASKED MEN enter. One is **
operating a small handheld VIDEO CAMERA. **

DAITO/TOSHIRO
Shoto, someone’s here! Someone **
just broke into my apartment!

Toshiro raises his visor - a split second before the
masked men yank him out of his OASIS gear. Then, without **
hesitation, they carrying him across the room and HURL **
HIM OFF HIS BALCONY. **

The intruder with the camera leans over and films Toshiro **
as he plummets thirty stories to his death.

INT. REAL WORLD - SORRENTO’S OFFICE - SAME TIME **

Sorrento sits alone in his office, watching Toshiro’s **
gruesome death on a viewscreen. He winces with distaste, **
then walks over to his bar and pours himself a drink. **

EXT. THE OASIS - DAITO’S WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Daito's avatar is taking heavy laser fire from all **
directions. The red warning light on his chest flashes

CONTINUED:

faster and faster, then goes solid red. His giant form COLLAPSES TO THE GROUND, nearly crushing Shoto. **

INT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - KITCHEN - SAME TIME

A small kitchen. Wade begins to ransack the cupboards, until he finds one filled with breakfast cereal. Hidden ** at the back is a box of CAP'N CRUNCH. Printed clearly on ** the front of it are the words "FREE TOY WHISTLE INSIDE!"

WADE **
(reciting) **
The Captain conceals the Jade Key **
in a white house long neglected. **

Wade dumps the box on the floor and locates the toy ** whistle. He blows it, but no sound comes out. **

WADE **
(reciting) **
You can only blow the whistle once **
the trophies are all collected. **

Wade runs out the kitchen, into the adjacent living room.

INT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - LIVING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The floor is covered with a large ORIENTAL RUG. Against ** the wall is an EMPTY GLASS TROPHY CASE. **

Wade opens a window on his HUD displaying a ZORK PLAYING FIELD MAP. The location of 7 TROPHIES are marked on it. Wade throws back the oriental rug, revealing a trap door. He opens the trap door and jumps through it.

INT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - CELLAR - CONTINUOUS

A dimly lit room. Wade runs to a bookshelf and swings it ** open like a door, revealing TWO TROPHIES hidden in a ** secret compartment. **

EXT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

As Daito’s avatar hits the ground, it transforms back to its normal size and appearance. Then it begins to disappear, slowing fading out of existence. Once he’s vanished completely, his avatar leaves behind DOZENS OF SPINNING ITEMS scattered on the ground-- everything he was carrying when he died.

CONTINUED:

Shoto considers going after them, but the Sixer ground troops are still closing in on him. Shoto dives aboard his ship. It lifts off and blasts into orbit, taking heavy fire from the Sixer gunships the entire way.

INT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - SAME TIME

Wade quickly places the trophies inside the glass case. ** Once it's full, he takes out his Cap'N Crunch whistle and ** blows it. The whistle changes into a JADE KEY! **

He hears a LOUD CRASH from the adjacent room as SIXER ** TROOPS BREAK DOWN THE FRONT DOOR.

Wade pockets the key and dives out the nearest window.

EXT. THE OASIS - WHITE HOUSE - CONTINUOUS

Wade hits the ground, rolls, and is back on his feet. As he sprints toward his ship, he spots something on the ground - DAITO'S BETA CAPSULE.

He snatches it up and keeps on running, just as another SQUADRON OF SIXER GUNSHIPs swoops down out of the sky and OPENS FIRE ON HIM!

Wade activates his JET BOOTS and takes flight. He banks and dives to avoid the barrage of laser bolts, then cuts off his jet boots and drops into his ship's cockpit. **

The Sixers continue to fire at him as he blasts upwards through the clouds. His ship begins to take heavy damage. **

SIXER GUNSHIPS appear behind Wade and begin to close in ** on him, just as he breaks free of the planet's orbit. **

A second later, Wade's starship jumps to LIGHT SPEED and vanishes in a STREAK OF LIGHT. **

INT. THE OASIS - JOE'S GARAGE - LATER

Wade's avatar sits in the waiting area for a spacecraft repair shop called Joe's Garage. Behind him, we can see a team of NPC MECHANICS making repairs to his starship.

Wade holds the Second Key in his hands, studying the ** inscription on its surface. He reads it aloud: **

CONTINUED:

WADE
The place that cures the soul... **
(beat)
Where do I know that from? **

His phone rings - it's a call from Shoto. His avatar appears in a vidfeed window. He's aboard his ship.

WADE
What the hell happened? **

SHOTO
They killed him. Daito is dead. **

WADE
Shit. He'll have to start over with a new avatar. There's no way he can catch up in time.

SHOTO
No, that's not what I mean. They-- They broke into Daito's apartment and killed him. In the real world. They murdered him...

Wade takes this hard, sits down. Deflated.

WADE
I'm sorry, Shoto.
(beat)
Why didn't he leave his apartment? **

SHOTO
He refused to be chased out of his **
home. He was proud. And stubborn. **
(beat) **
I'll meet you in Aech's chatroom. **

INT. THE OASIS - BASEMENT CHATROOM - LATER

Wade and Aech pace around the room, anxious. Art3mis has **
an arm around Shoto, comforting him.

SHOTO
Daito and I weren't really brothers. We only knew each other online. We never met in real life. But he was still my best friend and I considered him a brother. I know that must sound foolish...

CONTINUED:

ART3MIS
No, it doesn't.

WADE
Aech is my best friend, and we've never met in real life either.

AECH
Yeah. I'm kinda shy. **

Aech smiles. Shoto grins, looking relieved. **

They all suddenly startle, as they simultaneously hear another SCOREBOARD ALARM.

ART3MIS
That can't be good news.

She opens a window displaying the Scoreboard. SIXER EMPLOYEE NUMBERS NOW FILL EVERY SLOT, and the score of the Sixer in first place has just increased by another 30,000 points. In addition to the two gate icons beside his score, there is now a CRYSTAL KEY ICON.

ART3MIS
Perfect! The Sixers just found the Third Key. We've all been pushed completely off the Scoreboard!

They all react. Shoto hangs his head in defeat.

SHOTO
The Sixers are probably already closing in on the final gate. The contest is over. The Sixers are going to win.

Shoto gets up to leave.

WADE
No it's not. Not yet. We can still catch up with them. I know it.

He takes out his copy of the Second Key again, and studies the inscription. The others do the same thing.

AECH
"The place that cures the soul." I did an Internet search and got a few billion hits. It could refer to anything. Do you think he means a church somewhere or-- ** ** ** ** **

CONTINUED: (2)

ART3MIS **
No, Halliday was an atheist. **

WADE **
“The place that cures the soul.” **
It’s sounds so familiar-- **

Wade’s eyes go wide as he remembers something. He opens a **
window displaying a HISTORY TEXTBOOK and scans it: **

WADE **
That’s it! The library of **
Alexandria in ancient Egypt! There **
was an inscription on the wall **
above the shelves that read: “The **
place of the cure of the soul.” **

The other stare at him, extremely impressed. **

ART3MIS **
How do you know this? **

WADE **
My history prof took us there once **
on a virtual field trip. **

AECH **
I take back what I said about you **
wasting all your dough on college. **

WADE **
There’s a recreation of the **
library on the planet Demetrius! **
Follow me! **

Everyone is already sprinting toward the exit. **

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - LATER

Wade’s ship hurtles toward the planet DEMETRIUS, followed **
closely by Shoto, Aech, and Art3mis (all in Aech’s ship). **

EXT. THE OASIS - DEMETRIUS - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade flies his ship over a painstaking recreation of the **
ancient city of Alexandria, Egypt. **

Wade and Aech set their ships down outside the LIBRARY, a **
grand white-pillared structure. **

INT. THE OASIS - LIBRARY OF ALEXANDRIA - MOMENTS LATER **

Wade, Aech, Art3mis and Shoto enter a huge room filled with SHELVES holding thousands of ANCIENT SCROLLS. **

They run to the opposite side of the library. High on the wall above the shelves, there is an INSCRIPTION carved into the stone. It's in ancient greek. Wade points to it: **

WADE
(translating) **
The place of the cure of the soul. **

Wade takes out the Jade Key. As soon as he does, a KEYHOLE appears in the wall in front of them. **

Wade turns to Art3mis.

WADE
Ladies first.

ART3MIS
Why thank you. **

She places her key into the keyhole and turns. As she does, the SECOND GATE appears, embedded in the wall. It's a doorway-shaped PORTAL edged in glowing Jade stone. **

WADE **
We'll each be on our own until we reach the gate exit. **

ART3MIS **
See you guys on the other side. **

She winks at them, then dives into the gate. It closes and disappears. **

Wade nods at Aech and Shoto, then takes out his own Jade Key. Once again, a keyhole appears, and Wade slides his key into. Another gate opens.

WADE
Good luck, fellas.

He jumps through the gate. **

INT. THE OASIS - SECOND GATE **

Wade's avatar now stands inside a narrow dungeon corridor. The floor is comprised of FLOATING CIRCULAR PLATFORMS, arranged end-to-end in a long line that

CONTINUED:

stretches out into the darkness ahead of him. To his right and left, beyond the platforms' edge, there is nothing but an ENDLESS BLACK VOID.

Wade looks down at his avatar's body. On his right arm is a METAL GAUNTLET with a retractable SPIKED MACE. His right hand deftly holds THREE THROWING DAGGERS. Wade hurls the daggers off into the black void at his right and three more instantly appear in his hand. **

Wade tries jumping, and finds that he can leap thirty feet straight up. He lands with catlike grace.

A MESSAGE begins to flash on his HUD: PROVE YOUR STRENGTH AND WISDOM BY SLAYING THE BLACK DRAGON! **

Wade runs forward, leaping from platform to platform. As he runs, he fights off an onslaught of BLOBS, SKELETONS, SERPENTS and MUMMIES. **

INT. THE OASIS - SECOND GATE - LATER **

Wade does battle with a giant BLACK DRAGON. His hit points are almost at zero, but he keeps moving to stay clear of the dragon's fiery breath. **

Wade slowly knocks down the dragon’s LIFE METER with a steady barrage of daggers. As he strikes the final killing blow, the dragon crumbles to dust.

Wade lets out an exhausted sigh of relief.

The following text appears on his HUD: **

CONGRATULATIONS ON YOUR STRENGTH AND WISDOM! **
PLEASE ACCEPT A GIANT ROBOT AS YOUR REWARD:

A row of ROBOT ICONS appears on his display. Wade is able to scroll through a selection of over a hundred different "giant robots." When one is highlighted, a detailed list of its stats and weaponry appears beside it. Some of the robots have a RED X over them and cannot be selected. **

Wade selects a robot called LEOPARDON and taps fire button. A twelve-inch replica of it appears in his hands. As Wade grabs the robot and places it in his inventory, something else appears in the air in front of him: **

A GLOWING RED CIRCLE with a FIVE-POINTED STAR inside it. The points of the star extend just beyond the outer edge of the circle. A CRYSTAL KEY spins slowly in the center of the glowing red star.

CONTINUED:

Wade smiles with recognition, just as the symbol morphs into a door-shaped portal with Jade edges. THE GATE EXIT. **

Wade lets out a triumphant cheer and jumps through it.

INT. THE OASIS - ALEXANDRIA LIBRARY - DAY **

Wade's avatar reappears in the library. Art3mis is already there. She has a picture of the Red Star symbol open in a window in front of her. **

ART3MIS
Recognize this?

WADE
Of course I do. It's an album cover. By Halliday's favorite rock band, Rush. It's lyrics are all about individuality. Halliday listened to it whenever he wanted to be inspired... **

Wade does a quick file search and pulls up an IDENTICAL IMAGE of the Red Star symbol - on an old vinyl ALBUM COVER - "2112" by RUSH.

TWO GATE EXITS suddenly open in the air behind them and Aech and Shoto jump out, wearing excited grins.

AECH
The red star symbol! It's from a space opera album called 2112! **

SHOTO
By the band Rush! **

WADE
Yeah. We know. **

ART3MIS
The album's lyrics and liner notes tell the story of a planetary revolt against the Red Star of the Solar Federation. One of the songs is titled The Temples of Syrinx--

WADE
And there's a planet called Syrinx in Sector 10.

They all beam with excitement.

INT. THE OASIS - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME TIME

Sorrento stands at the center of a conference room, surrounded by his team. A giant VIEWSCREEN displays the Scoreboard. Sixers still hold the top ten positions. **

IOI-643187
Sir, there have just been four changes on the Scoreboard. Aech, Artemis, Shoto, and Parzival have just cleared the Second Gate.

SORRENTO
Parzival?!

IOI-643187
Yes sir. It appears that Wade Watts is alive. **

Sorrento seems impressed. **

SORRENTO
It doesn't matter now. Is the force field ready?

IOI-643187
Yes. The orb is in position above the Third Gate, sir.

SORRENTO
Then activate it. And prepare the Cataclyst.
(beat)
Now we control the final gate. **
Which means we've already won.

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COCKPIT - LATER

Wade is blasting Rush's 2112 on his cockpit stereo. The song lyrics appear on his HUD as Geddy Lee sings them:

GEDDY LEE (V.O.)
We are the Priests of the Temples of Syrinx. Our great computers fill the hallowed halls. We are the Priests of the Temples of Syrinx. All the gifts of life are held within our walls.

A planet swings into view directly ahead. Its name appears on Wade's nav readout: SYRINX

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET SYRINX

Wade and Aech land their ships on the outskirts of a crumbling DOMED CITY. They exit their ships and run toward the city, entering through a crack in the dome.

INT. THE OASIS - DOMED CITY - CONTINUOUS

A deserted futuristic city. Wade and his companions continue flying toward its center, where we see a giant PYRAMID-SHAPED TEMPLE. Above the entrance is a giant version of the RED STAR SYMBOL from the album cover.

Wade and the others run inside.

INT. THE OASIS - TEMPLE OF SYRINX - CONTINUOUS

Mammoth super-computers stand in long rows, filling the giant cathedral-like temple. Our heroes runs past them, to the very center of the temple. There they find a STONE ALTAR with the Red Star etched into its surface. On the altar is an ELECTRIC GUITAR. (A 1974 Gibson Les Paul.)

WADE
That has to be what we're looking for...

Art3mis looks around nervously.

ART3MIS
I don't like this. The Sixers have already been here. Why wouldn't they post guards around the key?

WADE
Probably because they've already found the Final Gate and posted their guards around it.

Wade picks up the guitar. As he does, the towering computers begin to emit a cacophony of sound. The noise builds to a deafening crescendo before ceasing abruptly. Then there is a flash of light the guitar transforms into the CRYSTAL KEY.

As Wade picks up the key, a chime sounds. He checks the Scoreboard. His score has increased by 25,000 points, bringing his total up to 353,000 points, one thousand points more than the top ranked Sixer.

Wade is back in first place.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

Another guitar appears on the altar. Aech grabs it and, once again, it transforms in a copy of the CRYSTAL KEY. Art3mis and Shoto repeat this process, and both also obtain copies of the key.

Wade examines his key, tilting it up to study its faceted surface. There are no words etched there, but he does see a small monogram etched in the center of the key's crystal handle, a single calligraphic letter ‘A’.

Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto do the same. They all study their keys for a moment. Then, in unison, they say:

ALL
Castle Anorak!

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - DAY

A huge BLACK CASTLE stands on a rolling green prairie. The castle entrance is a pair of IRON DOORS, each bearing an ornate letter ‘A.’ The same ‘A’ on the Crystal Key.

WE PULL BACK from the castle and see that it’s surrounded by an enormous semi-transparent SPHERICAL FORCE FIELD.

Just inside this field, encircling the castle, is the ENTIRE SIXER ARMY. Hundreds of Sixers AVATARS, GUNSHIPS, and HOVER TANKS are encamped outside the castle walls.

Outside the force field, hundreds of GUNTER AVATARS have gathered, curious about what the Sixers are up to here.

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET CHTHONIA - SAME TIME

Wade, Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto stand side-by-side on a rocky overlook a few kilometers away, each staring at the castle through binoculars.

AECH
Crap.

SHOTO
It looks like some kind of
magically generated force field. **

ART3MIS
We’re screwed.

WADE
There’s gotta be a way to bring **
down that shield and get inside... **

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

In the distance, a SMALL GUNTER SPACESHIP appears and swoops in low over the castle. It releases a BOMB and then pulls up sharply. As the bomb hits the force field, it detonates in a THERMONUCLER EXPLOSION!

They shield their eyes. In the distance a MUSHROOM CLOUD begins to form.

They all raise their binoculars to take another look at the castle. As the debris from the explosion dissipates, they can see that THE FORCE FIELD IS STILL INTACT.

ART3MIS
You were saying?

INT. THE OASIS - BASEMENT CHATROOM - LATER

Wade and the others are watching a NEWSFEED BROADCAST. A REPORTER stands in front of Castle Anorak. The force field and the Sixer army are visible in the BG.

NEWS REPORTER
As you can see behind me, the Sixers have barricaded Castle Anorak with some kind of impregnable force field. We believe that the Third Gate is somewhere inside the castle, and the Sixers want to prevent anyone else from reaching it. Gunters have been attacking the Sixer force field for over two hours, using everything from magic spells to thermonuclear weapons. So far, nothing has made a dent. It appears that the Sixers now have exclusive access to the Final Gate, so it's only a matter of time before they reach Halliday's jeweled crown and win the contest-- **

Wade closes the vidfeed window in disgust. He paces back and forth, deep in thought. **

WADE
If we could get access to the IOI intranet, I bet we could find a weakness in their defenses. **

ART3MIS
The IOI intranet is a standalone system. The only way to access it
(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

ART3MIS (CONT'D)
would be to get inside the IOI skyscraper in downtown Columbus. It can't be done.

WADE
Maybe it can... I'm in Columbus, just a few blocks away.

AECH
Dude, you're out of your mind! They know who your are. Your real name. Their retinal scanners will ID you the second you walk in the front door.

WADE
You're right, Aech. Wade Watts can't walk in there. But Bryce Lynch can.

ART3MIS
Bryce who?

Wade's face breaks into a broad grin. He turns to Aech. **

WADE
Choy-Boy has everything I need. **
(beat) **
I've got a plan. Now just hear me out...

EXT. REAL WORLD - COLUMBUS, OHIO - CITY STREETS - DAY

An AUTOTAXI rolls through downtown, surrounded by bicycles and rickshaws. A thin film of neglect covers everything, including the people.

The taxi arrives outside the gleaming I-O-I skyscraper complex and Wade gets out. He's dressed in a GREEN MAINTENANCE TECHNICIAN UNIFORM and carries a silver briefcase. He heads toward the center O-shaped tower, then walks around to a SERVICE ENTRANCE.

WADE **
This better work, Choy-boy. **

Wade holds his breath as the security system scans his retinas and the PICTURE ID clipped to his uniform. After a brief pause - THE DOORS SLIDE OPEN.

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS TOWER - MOMENTS LATER

Wade walks down a crowded corridor, filled with other IOI EMPLOYEES. Some wear business attire, while others were navy blue UNIFORMS similar those worn by Sixer avatars.

Wade steps onto a service elevator. It scans his ID and the doors close. **

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OOLOGY DIVISION - DAY

This is the Sixer cubicle bull-pin that Wade glimpsed during his holochat with Sorrento. He's walking right into the belly of the beast.

Wade sits down in an UNOCCUPIED CUBICLE and opens his briefcase. It contains a TABLET PC and some other gear.

Wade jacks the Tablet PC into the built-in OASIS console in the cubicle, then taps its touchscreen. An INTRANET LOGIN SEQUENCE appears. Wade glances around to make sure he hasn't been noticed. Then he takes a deep breath and punches in an ID number and an alpha-numeric password. A message appears: OOLOGY INTRANET - ACCESS GRANTED **

Wade sighs with relief, then his fingers begin to fly across the touchscreen, accessing menu after menu.

Then he pulls out his FLASH DRIVE and slides it into a slot on the Sixer OASIS console.

His fingers begin to dance across the touchscreen again, accessing various sub-menus. A rotating 3-D diagram of a CASTLE ANORAK appears, showing all of the Sixer troops encamped around it, along with their FORCE FIELD. **

Wade zooms in on the diagram to examine the interior rooms of the castle. An image of the THIRD GATE appears - A CRYSTAL DOORWAY embedded in the wall. **

Wade studies the data. PROGRESS BARS pop up as he begins to copy everything in the Sixer database. **

Then he accesses an OASIS EQUIPMENT REQUISITION FORM and begins to enter a long series of COMMANDS. **

We're not exactly sure what he's doing, but he finishes in a matter of seconds, then quickly packs up his gear. **

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OOLOGY DIVISION - DAY

Wade walks quickly down a carpeted corridor, carrying his briefcase. He's sweating now. A lot.

He passes a row of flatscreen MONITORS displaying Sixer status updates. Wade sees images of the Sixers troops stationed around Castle Anorak.

Then he almost has a coronary - the next monitor displays an old school photo of HIM! WADE WATTS, under the heading PRIMARY GUNTER THREATS. Then it switches to the dossier photo of Shoto we saw earlier.

Wade forces himself to keep moving.

INT. REAL WORLD - MAINTENANCE ELEVATOR - SAME

Wade steps onto an elevator. He holds his breath until the doors close, and the elevator begins to descend.

Wade glances up and spots a SECURITY CAMERA aimed right at him. He pulls his cap down to conceal his face.

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI SKYSCRAPER LOBBY - MOMENTS LATER

Wade steps off the elevator and begins to cross the crowded lobby. It's early in the morning and dozens of IOI suits are arriving for work. Wade nervously eyes a group of SECURITY GUARDS stationed nearby.

Wade resists the urge to run. He's almost to the exit doors when someone rest a hand on his shoulder.

MAN'S VOICE (O.S.)
Excuse me, sir?

Wade freezes, then turns to see a MAN in a suit.

MAN
Can you direct me to the Human Resources division?

Wade just stares at him, non-plussed.

WADE
No.

He turns and half-runs out the exit and hails an autocab. **

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S APARTMENT - LATER **

Wade runs in and quickly puts on his OASIS gear. As he **
pulls on his haptic gloves and lowers his visor we **

SMASH CUT TO: **

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - CONTINUOUS **

Wade's avatar reappears on the rocky cliff overlooking
the castle. He immediately accesses Aech's Chatroom and **
steps through the entrance.

INT. THE OASIS - AECH'S CHATROOM - CONTINUOUS **

Wade's avatar descends into the Basement. Aech, Art3mis,
and Shoto are there waiting for him.

AECH
You crazy son of a bitch! You made **
it out alive! **

WADE
(big grin) **
And the Sixers haven't figured out **
how to open the gate yet. **

They all stare at him in shock. **

ART3MIS
How is that possible? They have
the Crystal Key and they know
where the gate is. All they have
to do is unlock the damn thing--

WADE
That was true for the first two
gates. But Gate Three is different **
somehow. There must be some trick **
to opening it. I'm sure we'll be **
able to figure it out once we get **
there... **

The others look at him uncertainly. **

Wade makes a sweeping gesture with his right hand and a
three-dimensional hologram of Castle Anorak appears,
floating in the air. The transparent blue force field
surrounds the castle completely.

CONTINUED:

WADE
The shield is going to drop at noon tomorrow, about nineteen hours from now. **

ART3MIS
You're sure? **

WADE
It'll come down. Trust me. **

AECH
Even if it does, to reach the castle, we'll still have to fight our way through the largest army in the OASIS. **

Aech points to the hologram, which shows the Sixer troop positions around the castle, just inside the shield.

AECH
What about these guys? And their tanks? And gunships?

WADE
Obviously, we're going to need a little help.

ART3MIS
And who, exactly, is going to help us fight the entire Sixer army?

WADE
Everyone. Every single gunter in the OASIS. Being famous has its advantages... **

Wade taps an icon on his HUD - LIVE VIDEO BROADCAST. A virtual CAMERA appears in front of his avatar and he begins to speak directly into it. **

WADE **
Fellow gunters. As you know, the Sixers have barricaded Castle Anorak in an attempt to prevent any gunters from reaching the Third Gate... **

CUT TO: **

SERIES OF SHOTS: **

Avatars all over the OASIS watch Wade's broadcast: **

-STUDENTS at Wade's college watch in vidfeed windows **
suspended in the air around them. **

-GUNTERS gathered near Castle Anorak listen intently: **

WADE (V.O.) **
Unless gunters around the world **
join forces to stop them, the
Sixers will win and the OASIS will
fall under IOI's control. We can't
let that happen. Regardless of **
what you've heard about IOI, I can **
tell you for a fact that they're **
murderers who will do anything to **
take control of the OASIS... **

-SORRENTO and the Sixers watch from their command center: **

WADE (V.O.) **
Our assault on the Sixer army **
begins tomorrow at noon. Join us!

INT. THE OASIS - AECH'S CHATROOM - SAME TIME **

Wade ends the broadcast by tapping an icon on his HUD. **

WADE **
So? What did you think? I just **
broadcasted that to the entire **
OASIS. **

AECH **
Very moving, Z. **

ART3MIS **
Yeah, I'm getting all misty-eyed. **
But do you really think anyone is **
actually gonna show up? **

WADE **
No one wants the Sixers to win. **
They'll show. **

AECH **
But now the Sixers know we're **
coming. They'll be ready for war. **

CONTINUED:

ART3MIS
Guys, I'm logged in from a public terminal at an airport right now, paying for bandwidth by the minute. I can't fight a battle from here, much less try to clear the Third Gate. And I don't have anywhere to go.

SHOTO
Same here. I'm in a rented booth at a manga café. It isn’t safe for me to stay here, with Sixer agents out looking for me.

Art3mis looks at Wade’s avatar.

ART3MIS
Any suggestions?

WADE
I'm in hiding, too, remember? And we don’t have to get you guys fake ID cards... **

AECH
I've got an RV. But I don't think I can make it to Columbus, Vancouver, and Japan in the next nineteen hours... **

DEEP VOICE (O.S.)
I think I might be able to help.

They all jump and turn around, just in time to see a GRAY-HAIRED AVATAR appear directly behind them. It’s Og - Ogden Morrow's avatar - the co-creator of the OASIS. And he doesn't descend the staircase. He simply pops into existence, as if he’s been there all along, and has just now become visible.

WADE
Ogden Morrow. Holy crap.

AECH
How did you get in here? This is a private chatroom!

OGDEN MORROW **
Yes, I know. I'm afraid I've been eavesdropping on the four of you for quite some time now. Please
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (2)

OGDEN MORROW (CONT'D)
accept my apology. I did it with only the best intentions.

ART3MIS
With all due respect, sir. You didn't answer his question. How did you gain access to this chatroom? Without any of us even knowing you were here?

OGDEN MORROW **
You needn't worry. As co-creator ** of the OASIS, my avatar has many ** unique abilities. No one else has ** the ability to eavesdrop on you. Especially not the Sixers. OASIS chatroom security is rock solid. My presence here notwithstanding.

WADE
(to Aech)
He knocked over that stack of comic books! After our first meeting in here, remember? I told you it wasn't a software glitch!

OGDEN MORROW **
Yeah, that was me. I can be pretty clumsy at times.

WADE
Mr. Morrow--

OGDEN MORROW **
Please. Call me Og.

WADE
Okay. "Og." Why have you been ** spying on us?

OGDEN MORROW **
Before he died, I promised Jim that I would do everything I could to protect the integrity of his contest. He was worried that complications might arise after he was gone that would prevent the contest from proceeding as he'd intended.

AECH
Like the Sixers...

CONTINUED: (3)

OGDEN MORROW **
To be honest, I didn't really want **
the responsibility. But it was the
dying wish of my oldest friend, so
I agreed.

ART3MIS
So for the past five years, you've
just watched from the sidelines? **
Why didn’t you stop the Sixers? **

OGDEN MORROW **
Jim asked me not to get involved **
unless I felt it was absolutely **
necessary, and I respected his **
wishes. But now it seems I have no **
choice but to step in... **
(beat) **
I want to offer the four of you
sanctuary at my home here in
Oregon. From here, you'll be able
to execute your plan and complete
your quest in safety, without
having to worry about Sixers
kicking in your door.

ART3MIS
Thanks. But how are we supposed to
get to there? **

OGDEN MORROW **
I’ve chartered three private jets.
One for Art3mis in Vancouver. One
for Shoto in Osaka. And one for
Aech and Parzival in Columbus.
That is, if you boys don’t mind
sharing a ride?

WADE
(to Aech)
You’re in Columbus, too?

AECH
Yeah. I drove in last night,
incase you got caught by IOI and **
needed someone to bust you out.
(to Og)
But how did you know that?

Og grins.

CONTINUED: (4)

OGDEN MORROW **
I've just emailed each of you instructions on where to board the aircraft. Safe travels. I'll see all of you soon.

Og waves goodbye and vanishes. Wade looks at the others.

WADE
Well, this should be interesting.

AECH
Yeah. The four of us are finally going to meet in person.

SHOTO
It will be an honor.

Art3mis and Wade lock eyes.

ART3MIS
Yeah. I can hardly wait.

EXT. PRIVATE AIRSTRIP - NIGHT

An autotaxi stops by a row of AIRCRAFT HANGARS and Wade gets out. He walks toward a JET idling on the runway. **

INT. JET - CONTINUOUS

The door closes behind Wade as soon as he's on board. This is an automated aircraft, so the cockpit is empty. There also isn't any flight crew.

Wade makes his way back to the seating area, where he finds only one other passenger - a HEAVYSET AFRICAN-AMERICAN GIRL in her early 20s, wearing black jeans and combat boots. She's looking at Wade with fear and apprehension. There's something familiar about her face.

As Wade approaches, she smiles - a big CHESHIRE GRIN. And that's when Wade (and we) know for certain who this is:

WADE
Aech?

She nods, then her eyes drop to her boots. Nervous. **

WADE **
You're a girl?! **

CONTINUED:

Wade collapses into a seat across from her, eyes wide in disbelief. He seems angry, then he notices that Aech is trembling - she terrified of how he's about to react. **

Wade's anger vanishes, and he begins to laugh.

Aech finally relaxes and also starts to laugh.

WADE
Hey, Aech. How goes it?

AECH
It's going good, Parzival.

The jet starts to taxi and rockets up into the night sky.

INT. JET - LATER

Aech and Wade both stare out the windows in awe, looking down at the clouds, illuminated by the full moon.

AUTOMATED PILOT
We have reached our cruising altitude. ETA to destination: Three hours and nine minutes. Please relax and enjoy the flight.

With some effort, Wade turns away from the window.

WADE
I've never flown before, have you?

Aech shakes her head.

AECH
Not in the real world. Pretty cool, isn't it?

Wade nods, then studies her face a moment, still getting used to his best friend's new appearance.

WADE
So, what's your story, Aech? Why have you been masquerading as a dude all this time?

AECH
Why do you think? It simplifies things. Changes the way people treat you. For example, do you think you and I would have become
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

AECH (CONT'D)
best friends if my avatar had
looked like this?

She motions to her overweight frame.

WADE
Of course! I mean, I think so--
(beat)
Well, we definitely wouldn't have **
talked so much about chicks... **

Aech smiles.

WADE
What's your real name anyway?

AECH
Helen. Helen Harris.

WADE
Nice to meet you, Helen.

AECH
Nice to meet you, Wade.

EXT. PRIVATE RUNWAY - OREGON - NIGHT

The jet lands on a private runway, high in the Wallowa **
mountains. Wade and Aech step off the plane and gaze
around in wonder. A steep cobblestone staircase at the
edge of the runway leads up to a HUGE MANSION. **

EXT. OG'S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Wade and Aech approach and find Ogden Morrow outside **
waiting for them. He looks just like his avatar, except
that he's dressed in a plaid bathrobe and bunny slippers.

OGDEN MORROW
Welcome! Welcome to my home.

AECH
Thank you for inviting us, sir.

OGDEN MORROW
Ah, you must be Aech. I recognize
your voice.

Morrow doesn't seem at all surprised by Aech's
appearance. He gives her a bear hug, then turns to Wade.

CONTINUED:

OGDEN MORROW
And you must be Wade-- I mean Parzival! It’s an honor to meet you both! Come this way. Art3mis and Shoto are already here.

This news sets Wade on edge.

WADE
She is? I mean, they are?

OGDEN MORROW
Yes. They're already logged in to the OASIS, preparing for your assault on the Sixers!

Wade and Aech follow Morrow across the grounds, to the entrance of his mansion.

INT. MORROW’S MANSION - MOMENTS LATER

Morrow leads them through the hallways of his enormous home. They’re lined with classic arcade and pinball games, along with other pop culture artifacts.

OGDEN MORROW
I can't tell you how good it is to have visitors. Sad to say, I've been all alone here since Kira died. Except for my cooks, maids, and gardeners. But they don't really count as visitors...

INT. MORROW’S MANSION - IMMERSION BAYS - MOMENTS LATER

Morrow leads them into a long hallway, lined with SEVEN NUMBERED DOORS that look like airlocks. Two of them have their red “OCCUPIED” indicators lit up.

OGDEN MORROW
Shoto and Art3mis are in those two immersion bays. You can select any of the others. **
**

Wade seems both relieved and disappointed.

WADE
We’re not going to meet them now?

CONTINUED:

OGDEN MORROW
Art3mis felt that meeting you now would be an unnecessary distraction. She wanted to wait until after the big event. And Shoto seemed to agree.

Morrow motions to a door at the end of the hall.

OGDEN MORROW
You'll find haptic suits of all sizes in the dressing rooms. Get yourselves suited and booted!

INT. MORROW'S MANSION - IMMERSION BAYS - LATER

Wade and Aech emerge from the dressing rooms, now dressed in state-of-the-art haptic suits. Morrow wears one, too.

Aech shakes Morrow's hand, then turns to Wade.

AECH
Good luck, amigo. See you inside.

They bump fists and Aech enters one of the empty bays. The door hisses closed. Wade turns to Morrow.

OGDEN MORROW
The whole world is rooting for you. Try not to let them down.

WADE
We'll do our best.

OGDEN MORROW
I know you will.

He offers Wade his hand and they shake. Wade takes a step toward his immersion bay, the turns back.

WADE
Og, can I ask you one question?

OGDEN MORROW
If you're going to ask me what's inside the Third Gate, I have no idea. And even if I did, I wouldn't tell you. You know that.

WADE
No, I wanted to ask what happened between you and Halliday? In your
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

WADE (CONT'D)
biography, you said he just stopped speaking to you one day. In all my research, I've never been able to find out why...

Morrow studies him for a moment.

OGDEN MORROW
It was because of Kira. My wife. Jim was in love with her. Of course, she never knew how he felt about her. And neither did I. He never told me about it until the last time I spoke to him, right before he died. I think--

Morrow's voice catches.

OGDEN MORROW
I think Kira was the only women Jim ever loved.

Wade nods, then glances at Art3mis's immersion bay.

WADE
Thanks, Og. For telling me.

OGDEN MORROW
You're quite welcome. Good luck, Parzival. You're going to need it.

Morrow walks over to his immersion bay and steps inside.

WADE
What are you going to do? During the fight?

OGDEN MORROW
Sit back and watch, of course! This is going to be the most epic battle in OASIS history!

Morrow steps into his bay and the door hisses shut behind him. Wade takes a deep breath and steps into his own bay.

INT. IMMERSION BAY - CONTINUOUS

A small spherical room. The retractable haptic chair is suspended on a hydraulic arm attached to the ceiling. While he's logged in, Wade can walk or run in any direction and the sphere rotates around and beneath him. **

CONTINUED:

Wade climbs into the chair and pulls down his visor. As he logs in to the OASIS, the room goes dark.

EXT. THE OASIS - ROCKY OVERLOOK - DAY

Wade's avatar appears on the rocky cliff overlooking Castle Anorak. Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto are all there waiting for him. Art3mis motions to the sky overhead, which is filled with THOUSANDS OF SPACECRAFT, all headed toward the castle.

ART3MIS
Pretty wild, eh? I guess your message worked.

Wade nods, then takes out the TWELVE INCH TOY ROBOT he received after completing the Second Gate. He places it on the ground, then steps back away from it.

Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto do the same with their own toy robots, each of a different size and design.

WADE
Leopardon!

There is a piercing shriek of rending metal as the tiny robot grows to a height of almost a hundred meters! It holds a massive sword and spiderweb-embossed shield.

Wade enters a door in the robot's right leg.

The others shout different command words and their robots also GROW TO GIANT SIZE. They each climb aboard.

INT. THE OASIS - LEOPARDON COCKPIT - MOMENTS LATER

Wade settles into the captain's chair and presses a series of buttons on the control panel. Rocket boosters in the robot's feet ignite, launching it upwards. **

As Wade flies toward the castle, he's joined by Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto - each at the controls of their own GIANT ROBOT. Together, they descend toward Castle Anorak.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - CONTINUOUS

It's like an other-worldly Woodstock. Avatars stretch to the horizon in all directions. Thousands more float and fly through the air above, dodging the influx of ships. **

CONTINUED:

At the center of all this insanity stands CASTLE ANORAK, gleaming beneath the Sixers' transparent force field. ** Every few seconds an avatar or ship inadvertently FLIES ** INTO THE FORCE FIELD AND GETS VAPORIZED, like a fly hitting a bug zapper.

A clearing forms as Wade, Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto land their robots just outside the force field wall, while thousands of avatar cheer and chant their names.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - INSIDE THE FORCE FIELD

Inside the sphere, thousands of POWER-ARMORED SIXER AVATARS stand in silent formation, completely encircling the castle. They're flanked by rows of HOVER TANKS and GUNSHIPS. But in the face of the gunter mob that now surrounds them, the Sixers look woefully outnumbered.

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S COCKPIT - SAME TIME

Wade surveys the surreal scene through his cockpit windows. He hears Shoto's voice over his COMLINK:

SHOTO (V.O.)
It's showtime, Parzival.

INTERCUT AS NEEDED between Wade, Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto in each of their cockpits.

ART3MIS
Yeah. If that shield doesn't come down like you promised, this is going to be pretty embarrassing.

Wade checks his swatch - 11:55 AM.

WADE
Hold your horses. It's still five minutes to noon.

The crowds suddenly begins to BOO and HISS as the castle doors swing open.

AECH
And here comes that jerk Sorrento, right on cue.

Sorrento's avatar emerges from Castle Anorak. He waves at the Sixer troops directly in front of him and they scatter. Sorrento steps forward, positioning himself opposite Wade and the others, with the force field

CONTINUED:

between them. TEN OTHER SIXER AVATARS also emerge from the castle and stand behind Sorrento.

ART3MIS
I have a bad feeling about this.

Sorrento smiles up at Wade and his friends. When he speaks, his voice is amplified through SPEAKERS mounted on all of the tanks and gunships behind him.

SORRENTO
Welcome to Castle Anorak. We've been expecting you. But I am a bit surprised that so many of you showed up. By now it must be obvious, to even the most ignorant among you, that nothing can get past our shield.

The crowd noise lowers to a dull roar. When Wade replies, his voice is amplified out his robot’s external speakers.

WADE
You’re wrong, Sorrento. At noon, we’re coming in. All of us.

A ROAR of approval from the crowd. Sorrento smiles.

SORRENTO
You’re welcome to try.

He takes out an small item and sets it on the ground - it’s a METAL DINOSAUR with ARMOR PLATED SKIN and cannons mounted on its shoulder blades.

SORRENTO
Kiryu!

The robot lizard instantly grows in size, until it stands as tall as Castle Anorak itself, twice the height of the "giant" robots that Aech, Shoto, Art3mis, and Wade pilot. Its armored head almost touches the top of the shield.

An awestruck silence falls over the crowd, followed by a rumble of fearful recognition.

SHOTO
Mechagodzilla!

Sorrento enters the robot through an access door in one of its heels. A second later, the beast's eyes BEGIN TO GLOW BRIGHT YELLOW. Then it throws back its head, opens its jagged maw, and lets out a PIERCING METALLIC ROAR.

CONTINUED: (2)

On cue, the ten Sixer avatars standing behind Sorrento pull out their own robots and activate them. They grow in size to match the height of Wade's robot.

AECH
This just keeps getting better.

ART3MIS
How about that shield, Z?

Wade stares at second hand on his swatch.

WADE
Any second now. When I hacked in to the Sixers' database, I programmed one of their service droids to run a little errand for me... At noon exactly.

EXT. THE OASIS - SIXER BUNKER - SAME TIME

An armored bunker that the Sixers have erected behind Castle Anorak. Its filled with palettes of weapons and battle gear. A rack of SUPPLY DROIDS sits along the wall.

One of these droids powers itself on and rolls across the bunker and stop at a rack holding octahedron-shaped devices labeled ANTIMATTER FRICTION-INDUCTION BOMBS.

The little droid picks on up, then uses its claw-like index finger to enter a code on the bomb's CODEPAD. A small light on the device turns from GREEN to RED.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - MOMENTS LATER

The droid rolls out of the bunker, carrying the bomb up a series of ramps that the Sixers have built onto the castle's outer walls, providing access to its top level.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE PLATFORM - MOMENTS LATER

The droid rolls out onto the observation platform on the castle's top level. It draws curious looks from the SQUADRON OF ELITE SIXER GUARDS standing there.

They all watch as the droid rolls directly to the center of the roof, where a high-level SIXER WIZARD stands, clutching the Orb of Osuvox - the magical artifact generating the spherical shield around the castle.

CONTINUED:

The droid LIFTS THE BOMB OVER ITS HEAD AND DETONATES IT. **

The explosion vaporizes the droid, along with all the avatars stationed on the platform, including the SIXER WIZARD HOLDING THE ORB. The moment he dies, the orb deactivates and falls to the now-empty platform. At the same time, THE SHIELD AROUND THE CASTLE DISAPPEARS.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - DAY

Now that the shield is down, nothing separates the mighty Sixer and Gunter armies but open ground and empty space.

For a few seconds, nothing happens. Time seems to stop and everything is silent. Then ALL HELL BREAKS LOOSE.

A FIERCE BATTLE CRY rises from the sea of gunter avatars as they all SURGE FORWARD, converging on the Sixer army from every direction. It looks like Custer's Last Stand.

Art3mis, Aech, Shoto, and Wade are in the center of it all, as thousands of Sixers and gunters dive into the chaotic fray, bringing swords, guns, magic spells, and laser cannons to bear against each other.

ON SORRENTO - crushing dozen of avatars (including a few of his own troops) under his mech's titanic feet, as he lumbers DIRECTLY TOWARD WADE. Each of his footfalls leaves a small crater in the ground.

The Sixer army is taking a huge amount of fire from all directions, but Sorrento is getting hit more than anyone, because he's the biggest target on the battlefield.

The intense barrage of bullets, fireballs, missiles, and laser bolts quickly destroy the other giant Sixer robots behind Sorrento. But his robot somehow remains undamaged. Everything that hits him appears to ricochet harmlessly off his robot's armored body.

Dozens of spacecraft swoop and buzz around him, peppering his robot with rocket fire, but it has little effect.

AECH
It is <u>on</u>! **

Aech unloads his robot's considerable firepower at Sorrento, nailing him with a barrage of rockets.

Shoto begins firing his robot's PLASMA BOW at Sorrento.

Art3mis's nails Sorrento with a RED ENERGY BEAM.

CONTINUED:

Wade fires a GLOWING BOOMERANG that launches from his robot's forehead.

Art3mis’s attack is the only one that seems to have any affect. She blasts a chunk out Mechagodzilla’s shoulder, destroying the cannon mounted there.

But Sorrento doesn't pause in his approach. As he continues to close in on Wade, the Mechagodzilla's eyes began to glow a bright blue. Then Sorrento opens its mouth and a CASCADING BOLT OF LIGHTNING SHOOTS OUT!

The beam strikes the ground directly in front of Wade, then cuts a deep furrow in the earth as it continues to sweep forward, vaporizing everything in its path.

Wade and the others barely manage to leap out of the way, by launching their robots skyward.

Sorrento’s lightning weapon shuts down a second later, but Sorrento continues to stomp forward. His mech's eyes are no longer glowing blue.

AECH
I think we've reached the final boss.

ART3MIS
The eyes have stopped glowing. That weapon has to recharge!

Wade and the others spread out and begin to circle above Sorrento, making themselves moving targets.

WADE
Screw this, guys. I don't think we can destroy that thing.
(beat)
How about I distract him, while the three of you cut around and head for the castle entrance?

SHOTO
Sounds like a plan!

But instead of heading for the castle, Shoto banks and flies straight at Sorrento, closing the distance between them in the space of a few seconds.

SHOTO
Go! Sorrento is all mine!

CONTINUED: (2)

Aech cuts across Sorrento's right flank and Art3mis banks left, while Wade rockets up and over him.

Below them, Shoto faces off against Sorrento. Shoto's robot looked like an action figure next to Sorrento's massive metal dragon. Nevertheless, Shoto cuts his thrusters and drops to the ground directly in front of the Mechagodzilla.

AECH
Let’s go! The castle entrance is wide open.

Wade banks toward the castle. Below, he sees that the Sixer forces surrounding it have already being overrun by the endless mob of gunter avatars. The Sixers' lines are broken, and hundreds of gunters are streaming past them, running up to the open castle entrance - only to discover that they can't cross the threshold because they don't possess a copy of the Crystal Key.

Aech swings around directly in front of Wade. Still a hundred feet off the ground, he pops the hatch of his robot’s cockpit and leaps out, whispering the robot's command word in the same instant. As the robot shrinks back to its original size, Aech snatches it out of the air and stows it in his inventory. Now flying by some magical means, Aech's avatar swoops down, passing over the bottleneck of gunters clustered at the castle entrance, and disappears through its open double doors. **

A second later, Art3mis executes a similar maneuver - she stows her own robot in mid-air and then flies into the castle right behind Aech. But Wade hangs back.

WADE
(into comlink)
Shoto! We're going inside now! Come on!

SHOTO
Go on without me! I owe this son of a bitch some payback.

Shoto dives at Sorrento, swinging a giant sword in each of his mech's hands. The blades both cut into Sorrento's right side, creating a shower of sparks. Mechagodzilla's right arm now hands limp, nearly severed at the elbow.

Shoto fires his robot's boosters and heads toward the castle. But Sorrento has already swiveled his mech's head around and is now taking a bead on Shoto with TWO GLOWING BLUE EYES - his deadly lighting weapon has recharged.

CONTINUED: (3)

WADE
Shoto! Look out!

But Wade’s voice is drowned out by the SOUND OF THE LIGHTNING WEAPON, firing out of the Mechagodzilla's mouth. It nails Shoto's robot directly in the center of its back and it EXPLODES IN A HUGE FIREBALL.

WADE
Shoto! Shoto, do you read?

He scans the flaming wreckage, but the truth is obvious. Shoto’s avatar is dead.

Wade is momentarily stunned, which is unfortunate, because Sorrento's LIGHTNING WEAPON IS STILL FIRING, moving in a fast sweeping arc, cutting across the ground, then diagonally up the castle wall, toward Wade’s robot.

Wade tries to evade, but he’s too late. Sorrento nails his robot in the torso, a second before HIS LIGHTING WEAPON CUTS OFF and the MECHGODZILLA’S EYES STOP GLOWING.

The bottom half of Wade’s robot has been blasted away.

INT. THE OASIS - WADE’S COCKPIT - DAY

Every warning indicator in Wade’s cockpit starts to flash as his robot falls out of the sky in two burning halves.

Wade reaches up and yanks the ejection handle above his seat. The cockpit canopy pops off and Wade jumps free of the falling robot, a SPLIT SECOND BEFORE IT IMPACTS ON THE CASTLE STEPS, killing the avatars crowded there.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - CONTINUOUS

Wade fires his avatar's jetboots just before he hits the ground. He lands on his feet in front of the castle, just clear of his robot’s flaming wreckage.

A second later, a SHADOW SPILLS OVER WADE. He turns to see Sorrento's robot blotting out the sky as it raises its massive left foot, preparing to crush Wade.

Wade takes three running steps and jumps, firing his jetboots in mid-leap. The thrust throws him clear just as the Mechagodzilla's huge clawed foot slams down, forming a crater in the spot where Wade stood a second before.

CONTINUED:

The metal beast lets out another EAR-SPLITTING SHRIEK, followed by Sorrento’s hollow, booming laughter.

Wade cuts his jetboot thrusters and tucks his avatar into a ball. He hits the ground rolling, tumbles forward, then comes up on his feet. He squints up at the metal lizard's head. Its eyes aren't glowing again. Not yet.

AECH
Parzival! Where the hell are you?
We’re standing outside the gate,
and we can’t open it without you!

Wade heads toward the castle entrance, then turns back.

He takes out the Beta Capsule that belonged to Daito and hold the small metal cylinder over his avatar's head. **

WADE
Urutoraman!

There is a BLINDING FLASH OF LIGHT, and the sky turns crimson as Wade’s avatar changes, growing and morphing into a GIGANTIC RED AND SILVER-SKINNED HUMANOID ALIEN, with a light embedded in the center of his chest. He has become ULTRAMAN.

The Mechagodzilla stops shrieking. Its gaze is pointed down at the ground, where Wade’s avatar stood a second earlier. Now its head slowly tilts up, taking in the size of its new opponent, until THEIR EYES FINALLY MEET.

Wade now stands face to face with Sorrento's metal lizard, matching its height and size almost exactly.

WADE
Let’s do this.

Sorrento's robot takes several awkward steps backward.

Wade holds his arms up, forming a cross. A PULSING BEAM OF WHITE ENERGY SHOOTS OUT OF HIS FOREARMS, striking the Mechagodzilla in its chest and knocking it backward. Thrown off balance, Sorrento loses control and trips over his own mammoth feet. His robot tumbles to the ground.

A CHEER GOES UP from the thousands of avatars watching from the battlefield around them.

Wade launches himself into the air and flies half a kilometer straight up. Then he drops back down, feet first, aiming his heels directly at the Mechagodzilla's curved spine. When his feet hit, WE HEAR SOMETHING SNAP **

CONTINUED: (2)

under Wade's crushing weight. Smoke begins to pour out of the robot's mouth, and the glow in its eyes fades out.

Wade executes a back-flip and lands behind the prone robot in a crouch. Its single functioning arm flails wildly, while its tail and legs thrash about.

A glowing circular SAWBLADE OF ELECTRIC-BLUE ENERGY appears in Wade's right hand, spinning fiercely. He hurls it at Sorrento like a deadly frisbee.

It nails Mechagodzilla mid-torso. THE ENERGY BLADE CUTS INTO ITS METAL SKIN LIKE TOFU, slicing the robot in half.

Just before Mechagodzilla explodes, its HEAD DETACHES AND BLASTS AWAY FROM THE NECK. Sorrento has ejected. The rockets sprouting from the head began to lift it skyward.

But before it can get very far, Wade crosses his arms again and FIRES ANOTHER ENERGY RAY, nailing the retreating head like a clay pigeon. IT DISINTEGRATES IN A SATISFYING EXPLOSION as the CROWD GOES WILD.

Wade deactivates the Beta Capsule and his avatar returns to its normal size and form. Then he powers on his jetboots and flies into the castle.

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME TIME

The "Sixer bullpin" we saw earlier. Rows of cubicles filled with Sixers strapped into OASIS immersion rigs. One after another, they raise their visors as their avatars are killed in the battle at Castle Anorak. **

At the center of the bullpin, on a raised platform, is Sorrento's OASIS rig. Sorrento raises his visor, his face red with rage. One of his ASSISTANTS stands nearby.

ASSISTANT
All of our forces have been disabled or destroyed, sir. And Parzival has just joined Aech and Art3mis inside the castle. All three of them are at the gate.

SORRENTO
Put the primary gate camera on the main viewscreen.

A giant VIEWSCREEN mounted above the bullpin switches to a LIVE VIDFEED of Castle Anorak's foyer, where we see Aech and Art3mis standing in front of the Final Gate. **

CONTINUED:

SORRENTO
Is the Cataclyst ready for detonation?

ASSISTANT
Yes, sir. On your command.

SORRENTO
Not yet. Let's see if they can figure out how to open it.

Along with all of the other Sixers, Sorrento stares at the viewscreen with malevolent anticipation.

INT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - MOMENTS LATER

Wade flies into the castle foyer and lands beside Art3mis and Aech, who stand before the Final Gate - a LARGE CRYSTAL DOOR with a keyhole in the center. Three words are etched above the door: CHARITY. HOPE. FAITH. **

ART3MIS **
We were watching on the newsfeeds. **
Congrats on wasting Sorrento. **

WADE **
Thanks. Now let's figure out how to open this thing. **

Wade studies the words printed above the gate. **

WADE **
Charity, hope, faith. Where do I know that from? **

AECH **
Those words do sound familiar... **

They all stand there in silence, thinking. Then Wade's eyes light up. **

WADE **
Read them in reverse order! Faith, hope, charity. **
(reciting/singing) **
Faith and Hope and Charity... **

ART3MIS **
The heart and the brain and the body... Give you three... **

CONTINUED:

AECH **
...as a magic number! **

AECH & ART3MIS & WADE **
Schoolhouse Rock! **

ART3MIS **
Three is a Magic Number! Music and **
lyrics by Bob Dorough. 1973. **

WADE **
It must be Halliday's way of **
telling us how many keys are **
required to open the gate... **

AECH **
It takes three. **

ART3MIS **
No more, no less. **

WADE **
You don't have to guess. **
Three, is the magic number. **

As Wade finishes reciting the lyrics, TWO ADDITIONAL **
KEYHOLES APPEAR, on either side of the first.

AECH
Whoa. **

ART3MIS **
Why would Halliday require three **
keys to open the gate? **

WADE **
To force us to work together. **

Wade takes out his copy of the Crystal Key and holds it **
up. Aech and Art3mis do the same. **

They step forward and each place their key in a different **
keyhole, then turn them clockwise. **

Their keys vanish, and the GATE DOOR SWINGS INWARD,
revealing a field of stars beyond.

AECH **
That did it! I can't believe this! **
We're really here. **

ART3MIS
Here we go.

CONTINUED: (2)

They all three step forward, preparing to enter the gate.

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME TIME

Sorrento and the other Sixers have been watching all of this on their viewscreen. Staring up at it, Sorrento smiles with satisfaction, then shouts into his headset.

SORRENTO
Detonate the Cataclyst. Now!

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - SIXER GUNSHP - SAME TIME

A lone Sixer gunship floats in orbit above Chthonia.

INT. THE OASIS - SIXER GUNSHIP - CONTINUOUS

Inside the gunship's cargo hold, a SIXER WIZARD holds a RUBY SKULL in both hands - the CATACLYST. He hears Sorrento's order over his comlink and immediately whispers the artifact's command words:

SIXER WIZARD
Detonate Cataclyst.

The Cataclyst DETONATES WITH THE FORCE OF A MILLION NUCLEAR WEAPONS, filling the cargo hold with a BLINDING WHITE LIGHT.

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - SAME TIME

The gunship is vaporized, and the EXPLOSION SPREADS OUTWARD IN A GROWING SPHERE OF DESTRUCTION.

When it reaches the nearby planet Chthonia, it strips the planet surface clean, incinerating everything in its path - buildings, vehicles, and the MILLIONS OF AVATARS still gathered around Castle Anorak.

INT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - SAME TIME

The blast wave rips through the castle, a split second before Wade, Aech, and Art3mis reach the gate.

For a split second we see THEIR AVATARS' SKELETONS, suspended inside the outlines of their burning bodies. THEY ARE ALL VAPORIZED. **

CONTINUED:

Wade, Aech, and Art3mis each see same words flash on their heads-up displays: GAME OVER

EXT. THE OASIS - CRYSTAL GATE - SAME TIME

A barren wasteland surrounds the castle on all sides, stretching to the horizon. The castle is the only thing that wasn't destroyed in the blast.

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - SAME TIME

The Cataclyst's sphere of destruction continues to expand, engulfing more planets and stripping them clean. Every spacecraft it encounters is also vaporized.

But then the blast wave dissipates as it reaches the sector's outer cube-shaped border.

INT. REAL WORLD - AECH'S IMMERSION BAY - SAME TIME

Aech pulls off her visor. Her face is contorted in rage. She can't believe what just happened. **

INT. REAL WORLD - ART3MIS'S IMMERSION BAY - SAME TIME

Art3mis also raises her visor, and we see her in person for the first time. She slams her fist into the wall.

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME TIME

Sorrento watches the devastation on his viewscreen, nodding with approval. Then he turns and climbs back into his immersion rig. His assistant runs up.

ASSISTANT
The back-up squadron is in position, sir. Just outside the blast radius. **

SORRENTO
Good. Give me control of the most powerful avatar in that squadron.

The assistant nods. Sorrento pulls down his visor.

INT. THE OASIS - SIXER GUNSHIP - CONTINUOUS

Sorrento's NEW AVATAR appears on the bridge of a Sixer gunship. This avatar doesn't look like Sorrento - it has the same face as every other Sixer. But as he turns to the pilot, HIS FACE CHANGES BACK TO THE ONE WE RECOGNIZE:

SORRENTO
Cross the zone border and proceed directly to Castle Anorak. **

EXT. THE OASIS - OUTER SPACE - SAME TIME

THREE SIXER GUNSHIPS drift through space. A short distance away, a row of PULSING BUOYS mark the border between Sector 6 and Sector 7. The Gunships turn and cross into Sector 7, then jump to lightspeed.

INT. REAL WORLD - WADE'S IMMERSION BAY - SAME TIME

Wade is still in his immersion rig. He reaches up to remove his visor, but then he freezes...

INT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - SAME TIME

Wade's avatar slowly REAPPEARS directly in front of the gate. All of his armor and weapons are gone, and his avatar now wears a default outfit - a T-shirt and jeans.

A message appears on his HUD: CONGRATULATIONS, PARZIVAL! YOU HAVE AN EXTRA LIFE!

He looks down at his open palm and sees the QUARTER he bought in that shop on Incipio. The coin glows brightly for a second, then vanishes. **

Wade looks up at the Crystal Gate, still open in front of him. He jumps into it, and the gate closes behind him.

INT. THE OASIS - THIRD GATE

Wade finds myself standing in a huge oak-paneled room, the size of a warehouse. There are no windows, and the only one exit: double-doors set into one wall.

A high-end OASIS immersion rig stands at the absolute center of the room. Over a hundred glass tables surround it, arranged in a circle. On each one is a different video game system, accompanied by tiered racks that hold

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED:

a complete collection of its controllers and games. Every model of Atari, Nintendo, Sega, Playstation, and XBOX ever made. All arranged perfectly, like museum exhibits.

At the back of the room, is a wooden desk, on which sits an old desktop PC. **

Wade looks around in awe for a moment, unsure of what to do. Then he runs over to the Atari 2600 system, which is hooked up to an old Zenith TV - just like the one in Halliday's living room. He flips the power switch. **

Nothing happens. Wade checks the power supply - its plugged into a wall outlet. Wade tries the Intellivision system beside it. It won't power on either. He runs from one game system to the next. None of them will turn on.

WADE
What the hell?!

Wade runs over to the exit, but the doors won't open.

AECH (V.O.)
Hey, Z? Can you hear me?

It's AECH'S REAL VOICE - not altered to sound male.

WADE
Yeah. But where are you?

AECH (V.O.)
I'm dead, like everyone else.
Everyone but you.

WADE
Then how can I hear you?

AECH (V.O.)
Og patched us into your audio and video feeds. So we can see what you see and hear what you hear.

INT. REAL WORLD - OG'S CONTROL ROOM - SAME TIME

Og, Aech, Art4mis, and Shoto stand in a control room that overlooks the immersion bays. They're all gathered around a large viewscreen that display the POV of Wade's avatar.

OGDEN MORROW
Is that okay with you, Parzival?
If it isn't, just say so.

CONTINUED:

WADE (V.O.)
No, it's fine. Shoto and Art3mis are listening in, too?

INTERCUT AS NEEDED between Wade inside the OASIS and the others in the control room.

SHOTO (V.O.)
Yeah, I'm here.

ART3MIS (V.O.)
Yeah, we're here. And we're all dead as doornails. The question is, why aren't you dead, too?

Wade holds up the quarter. **

WADE
I had an extra life. I was sure ** the shopkeeper I bought it from ** had ripped me off... **

AECH
You lucky son of a bitch! The newsfeeds are reporting that every single avatar in the sector was just killed. Over half the population of the OASIS. Toast.

WADE
What the hell happened?

SHOTO
The Sixers detonated the Catacylst. The most destructive artifact ever created. Basically, a magical super-bomb that destroys everyone and everything in an OASIS sector.

AECH
The Sixers must have been sitting on it all this time, waiting for the perfect moment to detonate it.

WADE
But they just killed off all of their own troops, too. Why would they do that?

AECH (V.O.)
It was the only way they could stop us from entering the gate.

CONTINUED: (2)

ART3MIS (V.O.)
They must have been watching us. **
With a remote camera hidden near **
the gate.

AECH (V.O.)
So they saw us open it. Which
means they know how to open it
now, too.

WADE
So? Sorrento's avatar is dead. And
so are all of the other Sixers.

ART3MIS (V.O.)
Wrong. Check the Scoreboard. There
are still twenty Sixer avatars
listed there, below you. And every
single one of them has a copy of
the Crystal Key.

Wade pulls up the Scoreboard. His name is now at the top, followed by nothing but IOI employee numbers.

AECH (V.O.)
The Sixers knew they might have to
detonate the Cataclyst, so they
moved twenty of their avatars
outside of the blast radius. **

ART3MIS (V.O.)
Which means they're on their way
to the Castle right now. They
could reach the gate any second.

SHOTO (V.O.)
So you should probably hurry up
and find the crown before they get **
there.

Wade looks around at all of the dormant game systems.

WADE
I'm working on it. But none of the
game systems will power on.
(beat)
You guys got any suggestions? **

ART3MIS
You're in a replica of the office **
in Halliday's mansion. Why don't
you start by check the computer on
(MORE)

CONTINUED: (3)

ART3MIS (CONT'D)
his desk. Maybe it controls the power to all of the game systems. **

Wade sprints across the room.

EXT. THE OASIS - PLANET CHTHONIA - SAME TIME

The Sixer gunships land directly in front of the Crystal Gate, which is now closed again. Twenty Sixer avatars emerge from the gunships, led by Sorrento. **

Sorrento and two other Sixers activate their jetpacks and fly up to the gate. They each take out a copy of the Crystal Key.

SORRENTO
Three is the magic number.

Two additional keyholes appear in the gate, just as before. Sorrento and the other two Sixers use their keys to open it, then they fly inside.

INT. THE OASIS - SORRENTO'S THIRD GATE - CONTINUOUS

Sorrento appears inside his own instance of the Third Gate, standing alone inside Halliday's huge office. The other two Sixers aren't with him. **

INT. REAL WORLD - IOI OPERATIONS COMPLEX - SAME TIME

The giant viewscreen is split into three windows, each displaying a different avatar's POV. Sorrento and the other two avatars each stand alone, inside their own copy of the third gate.

Sorrento gives order to his team from his haptic rig's comlink. His voice is amplified throughout the room:

SORRENTO
We're in! I want everyone working on this. Begin by analyzing the contents of this room. Move!

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S THIRD GATE - SAME TIME

Wade sits down at Halliday's desk and presses the power button on his ancient desktop computer.

CONTINUED:

WADE
It's booting up!

The screen boots up to a PASSWORD prompt.

WADE
It's asking me for his password.

Wade types in ANORAK and hits ENTER. The display reads: PASSWORD INCORRECT - TRY AGAIN.

AECH (V.O.)
Try Zaphod. That was the name of Halliday's pet ferret! **

SHOTO (V.O.)
No! Try Tiberius. That was the name of his pet fish. **

Wade types in ZAPHOD. The display reads: PASSWORD INCORRECT - TRY AGAIN.

He tries TIBERIUS and it doesn't work either. **

ART3MIS **
No... Halliday would have made the password something we could figure out, based on what we've learned about him. What was the most important thing in his life? **

AECH **
The OASIS? **

SHOTO **
Try the names of some of his favorite authors! **

Wade stares at the screen intently. Then he recalls what Og said to him earlier, outside the immersion bays: **

OGDEN MORROW (V.O.) **
Kira was the only woman Jim ever loved. **

WADE **
Halliday was secretly in love with Og's wife. Kira Morrow. **

INT. REAL WORLD - OG'S CONTROL ROOM - SAME TIME **

Aech and Art3mis look at each other and say in unison: **

CONTINUED:

AECH & ART3MIS **
How do you know that? **

WADE (V.O.) **
Og told me. **

They turn around to look at Og, only to discover that **
he's left the control room. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S THIRD GATE - SAME TIME **

Wade types in the name KIRA and hits ENTER. Once again, **
the display reads: PASSWORD INCORRECT - TRY AGAIN. **

WADE **
Shit! **

ART3MIS **
Any more bright ideas? **

Wade wracks his brain. Then an idea hits him: **

WADE **
What was the name of Kira Morrow's **
OASIS avatar? **

ART3MIS **
Leucosia. **

Wade types LEUCOSIA and hits ENTER. Every game system in **
the room suddenly powers itself on. **

WADE **
That's it! **

INT. THE OASIS - SORRENTO'S THIRD GATE - SAME TIME **

Sorrento is also seated at Halliday's desktop PC. The **
monitor is filled with failed password attempts. **

He types in KIRA and hits ENTER. The display reads: **
PASSWORD INCORRECT - TRY AGAIN. **

He shouts into his comlink. **

SORRENTO **
That's not it either! Figure this **
out <u>now</u>! We're out of time! **

ASSISTANT (V.O.) **
Yes, sir. We're trying, sir. **

INT. THE OASIS - WADE'S THIRD GATE - SAME TIME **

Wade looks around at the hundreds of video game systems. **

WADE **
Okay. Where did he hide the crown? **

Wade thinks for a moment, then he **

FLASHBACKS TO - Wade walking through Halliday's boyhood **
home on the planet Middletown. In the living room, he **
notices an ATARI 2600 HOOKED UP TO THE TELEVISION. **

Wade runs over to the Atari 2600 and searches through the **
rack of game cartridges beside it, until he finds the one **
he's looking for: ADVENTURE. **

He shoves it into the Atari and turns the system on, then **
grabs a joystick and starts the game. **

AECH (V.O.) **
What are you doing? What is he **
doing? **

ART3MIS (V.O.) **
Adventure on the Atari 2600. It **
contains the first video game **
Easter Egg in history. A secret **
room hidden in one of its mazes... **

It only takes Wade a minute to reach the Secret Room. **
There, at very the center of the screen, is a large white **
oval with pixilated edges. A crown. Halliday's Crown. **

There is a BRILLIANT FLASH OF LIGHT, and then Wade sees **
that his avatar is no longer holding a joystick. He now **
holds a large jeweled CROWN. He can see his avatar's **
warped reflection on its curved surface. **

Wade looks up from the crown to see Anorak standing in **
directly front of him. **

ANORAK **
Congratulations, Parzival. You **
found my crown. You win the **
contest. Are you ready to receive **
your prize? **

Wade is too excited to speak. He manages to nod. **

CONTINUED:

ANORAK **
First, I have to ask you one last **
question... Do you know what the **
biggest regret of my life was? **

Wade thinks a moment before answering... **

WADE **
That you never took a chance at **
finding happiness in the real **
world. That you spent your entire **
life hiding inside the OASIS. **

Anorak nods and smiles wide. **

ANORAK **
That's right. Please don't make **
the same mistake. Live your life. **
Don't spend it hiding in here... **

Anorak reaches out and touches the crown in Wade's hands. **

Cascading bolts of blue lightning erupt from the crown, **
enveloping Wade. When the lightning subsides, the crown **
has vanished, and we see that WADE'S AVATAR IS NOW **
DRESSED IN ANORAK'S ROBES. **

And Anorak now looks just like James Halliday. Pale. **
Thin. Middle-aged. He wears worn jeans and a faded Space **
Invaders T-shirt. **

HALLIDAY **
I'm entrusting the care of the **
OASIS to you now, Parzival. Your **
avatar is immortal and all **
powerful. Whatever you want, all **
you have to do is wish for it, and **
the OASIS will comply. Pretty **
sweet, eh? **

Wade nods, still in shock. Halliday waves his hand and a **
BIG RED BUTTON labeled "OFF" appears on Wade's HUD. **

HALLIDAY **
This is the off switch for the **
OASIS. If you push it, the entire **
simulation will shut down, and a **
tapeworm program will erase all of **
the backup servers. If you think **
it's necessary, you now have the **
power to turn the OASIS off **
forever. Understand? **

CONTINUED: (2)

WADE
Yes. I do.

HALLIDAY
Good. But do me a favor, will you? Try and use your new powers only for good. Okay?

WADE
I'll do my best.

HALLIDAY
I know you will. Good luck, Parzival.

Halliday waves goodbye and then vanishes in another flash of light. Wade sees that the room's door are now open. Through them, he can see Castle Anorak, which has been magically rebuilt. Wade walks toward the exit.

EXT. THE OASIS - CASTLE ANORAK - CONTINUOUS

Wade's avatar emerges from the gate in front of Castle Anorak, which now looks as good as new.

A second later, SORRENTO'S NEW AVATAR and TWENTY OTHER SIXERS are ejected from their own copies of the gate and dumped on the ground directly in front of Wade's avatar.

Sorrento gets to his feet and faces Wade. The other Sixers quickly form ranks behind him.

WADE
Hello, Sorrento.

SORRENTO
Watts. I suppose congratulations are in order--

Wade doesn't hesitate. He stretches out his hands and BLUE LIGHTNING ERUPTS FROM HIS FINGERTIPS, nailing all of the Sixers (except Sorrento) directly in the chest, KILLING THEM. Their avatars slowly fade out of existence. Wade looks down at his hands.

WADE
Bad ass.

He looks back at Sorrento, who stands there stoically, awaiting his fate.

CONTINUED:

WADE
There's something I want you to see, Sorrento. You and the rest of the world.

Wade opens a VIDFEED WINDOW in the air beside him. Then he taps an icon on his HUD and the words GLOBAL BROADCAST appear superimposed across the bottom of the window.

ON THE VIDEO - It's a clip of Daito's real world murder, filmed by one of his killers. We see the intruders break into his apartment, yank him out of his haptic chair, and hurl him off his balcony.

WADE
I found this video clip on the IOI intranet. Along with a lot of other incriminating data. It proves that you had Daito murdered.
(beat)
You're going to pay for what you've done, Sorrento.

Sorrento seems about to reply when Wade BLASTS HIS AVATAR with another burst of BLUE LIGHTNING. Sorrento's avatar is VAPORIZED and slowly fades out of existence.

Wade looks around at the barren landscape, then up at the restored castle. An idea occurs to him.

He taps a SUPERUSER COMMAND ICON on his HUD.

WADE
I wish that the avatars named Aech, Art3mis, and Shoto be resurrected, with all of their possessions intact.

A message flashes on his HUD: SUPERUSER COMMAND EXECUTED - RESURRECTION COMPLETE!

Wade hears their reaction:

AECH & SHOTO (V.O.)
Holy shit!

WADE
You guys might want to try logging back in now.

CONTINUED: (2)

A few seconds later, Aech and Shoto log back in and their avatars appear in front of Wade. Aech looks down at himself in awe. **

AECH **
Good as new! Thanks, Z. **

Shoto bows low. **

SHOTO **
Arrigato, Parzival. **

WADE **
You're welcome. **
(beat) **
Where's Art3mis? **

AECH **
She said she was going outside to get some fresh air. **

Wade smiles. **

INT. REAL WORLD - OG'S MANSION - DAY **

Wade steps out of his immersion bay. Og is there waiting to meet him. **

OGDEN MORROW **
Well done, my boy! Well done! **

WADE **
Thanks, Og. **

OGDEN MORROW **
Several executives from OASIS Systems arrived while you were logged in. Along with all of Jim's lawyers. They're waiting upstairs. As you can imagine, they're anxious to speak with you. **

WADE **
Do I have to talk to them right now? **

OGDEN MORROW **
No, of course not! They all work for you now, remember? Make the bastards wait as long as you like! My lawyer is up there, too. He's a good guy. A real pit bull. He'll **
(MORE)

CONTINUED:

OGDEN MORROW (CONT'D)
make sure that no one messes with you, okay?

WADE
Thanks, Og. I owe you bigtime.

OGDEN MORROW
Nonsense! I haven’t had this much fun in decades!

Wade glances around uncertainly.

WADE
Do you know where Art3mis went?

Og grins and points behind Wade.

OGDEN MORROW
Up those stairs and out the first door you see. She'd waiting for you in my garden maze. Shouldn't take you long to find her...

EXT. OG’S MANSION - DAY

Wade steps outside. He shields his eyes as they adjust to the sunlight. Then he walks across the expansive lawn and enters Og’s elaborate GARDEN MAZE. He quickly realizes that it’s identical to labyrinth inside the First Gate.

EXT. GARDEN MAZE - MOMENTS LATER

Wade makes his way through the maze, walking faster and faster, until he’s flat out running.

He reaches an open area at the maze's center. A large fountain stands there - a sculpture of a BLACK DRAGON, spitting a stream of water instead of breathing fire.

And then he sees her.

Art3mis is sitting on a stone bench, staring into the fountain. She has her back to him. Her long black hair spills down over her right shoulder.

WADE
Hello.

She lifts up her head, but doesn’t turn around. Wade walks around the fountain to stand in front of her. She keeps her head down, and avoids eye contact.

CONTINUED:

WADE
You look just like I always
pictured you would. Beautiful.

She finally looks up at him.

ART3MIS
Oh yeah? Well you look just like I
always thought you would, too.
Butt ugly.

Wade laughs. Art3mis pats the bench beside her. He sits.

ART3MIS
We haven't been formally
introduced. I'm Samantha.

WADE
Hello, Samantha. I'm Wade.

They shake hands - touching each other for the first
time. Neither of them lets go.

ART3MIS
It's nice to finally meet you in
person, Wade.

They sit in silence for a moment.

ART3MIS
So what happens now?

WADE
We could make out...

ART3MIS
I don’t know about that. After
all, we just met.

They sit there holding hands, looking at each other and
at the garden around them. Eventually, she leans over and
kisses him. He looks like he’s been struck by lightning.

WADE
You know, for the first time in my
life, I have absolutely no desire
to log back in to the OASIS.

Art3mis nods. He puts his arm around her and they kiss
once again as we

FADE OUT.